

Books by
ANTHONY GIBBS

LITTLE PETER VACUUM
THE ELDER BROTHER
HIGH ENDEAVOUR
ENTER A GREEK
HEYDAY
YOUNG APOLLO
THE NEW CRUSADE
LONDON SYMPHONY
THE DRAMATIST
ROYAL EXCHANGE
and
UNCLE LAZARIUS (and Other Stories)

RESTORATION COMEDY

ANTHONY GIBBS

79960

HUTCHINSON & COMPANY
LONDON

PRINTED IN
GREAT BRITAIN,
AT THE ANCHOR
PRESS, TIPTREE,
ESSEX

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

HARRY'S PLAGE

THE FAMILY BATH

THE BATH THE MOST WORLDLY OF
THE WHOLE MEDITERRANEAN
LITTORAL

GENTLEMEN AND LADIES THE
CLIENTS ARE RESPECTFULLY IN-
FORMED THAT VESTMENTS OF THE
BATH ARE RIGOROUSLY INSISTED
MME HARRY, PROPRIETRESS

THE DAY WAS SIZZLING THE SHADE TEMPERATURE was 98° But there was no shade On one side the white hotels of the Promenade des Anglais blazed blinding white in the afternoon sun as they receded in a torrid semicircle into the more and more opulent distance Behind them the barren mountains quivered against a cloudless sky On the other side the Mediterranean, exaggeratedly blue, serenely unruffled by the worldly and family antics of Madame Harry's clients at its nearer edge, stretched away into the hot extremities of sea and air and sky

You are aware perhaps of this Harry's Plage? On this August afternoon the bright yellow fence which surrounds the place, dividing in the middle to break into a kind of triumphal arch composed of the above-mentioned notice done in blue lettering on a yellow board, separated the clients of the good Madame Harry into the "wets" and the "drys" Through its interstices and the gaps between the single and the double bathing-cabins could be seen half of all that was most *familiale* and *mondaine* in the autogenous

population of Nice, advancing modestly towards the Mediterranean in horizontal stripes, there to paddle and to shriek and to flounder near the great pipe which is one of the outlets of the town drains. On the land side of the triumphal archway, and restrained from a concerted rush by the stalwart person of Madame Harry herself, standing with her legs akimbo and an expression of bronzed ferocity, the rest of all that was most *bourgeois* and representative of the best traditions of Nice had formed itself into a queue perhaps fifty yards long.

Towards the middle of this queue—and here is the whole point of this recital—waited a tall, big-boned young man wearing a copy of the *Eclaireur de Nice* upon his head. A blue singlet betrayed an expansive chest and strong brown arms. A bathing-suit and a towel were slung about his neck, and his face bore a look of almost ecstatic preoccupation. His name was Gary Williams.

In front of him a very ample lady in black, with her lunch in a bag, and a great wealth of peroxidized hair, was absorbed in a book entitled *The Mistresses of Napoleon*. In front of her was a small boy in very short socks and strong glasses, eating something out of his pocket. In front of him two young persons in black, with something rather bonny about the backs of their necks, prattled furiously in unintelligible French and seemed inclined to allow their roving glances to alight momentarily with provocative amusement on the *Eclaireur* as worn by Gary Williams. In front of them was a gentleman in a bowler hat, whose bold moustachios could be seen protruding from either side of a creased and ballooning neck. He was the vanguard, and only Madame Harry, from her position of authority, could confirm what one suspected with tolerable certainty from behind—the Legion of Honour in his buttonhole. Beside Gary Williams—and here perhaps is, after all, the main point of this recital—stood a

girl of quite extraordinary and unexampled beauty

This is the explanation of the expression of almost painful disinterest which seamed his usually cheerful and open countenance. His own feelings in the matter were that she was almost dangerously beautiful. She was much shorter than he was, and in a succession of sidelong glances he had been well able to appreciate the way in which her dark hair was parted in the middle to show off a particularly nice forehead. He could also see, by looking down his cheek, that she was wearing a white knee-length skirt, and a dark-blue bib which, fastened by a loop round her neck, left her shoulders and back quite bare. He was of the opinion that they were very firm and good shoulders, most agreeably tanned, and indeed the whole effect was one which induced in our Gary an irresistible inclination to shuffle his feet and a pious determination to observe the Nice skyline and whistle in between glances.

At intervals of ten minutes or so one or more of the *mondaine* and *famihale* clients of Madame Harry would emerge with damp hair through the triumphal archway, and, after a flutter of the eyelashes in sympathy for the waiting queue, would trip familiarly upon their worldly way. When that happened Madame Harry would call out in a big bass voice "*Une !*" or "*Deux personnes !*" tear two lengths of blue cardboard from the roll at her hip, write numbers on them in pencil, slide a few francs into the leather satchel slung round one hefty shoulder, and the whole queue would struggle forward.

The gentleman with the Legion of Honour had long since descended the beach, placed his bowler carefully upon a cairn of stones, and abandoned himself to the embraces of the Mediterranean. Then the two young persons had gone in, to reappear shortly afterwards in the act of pulling down their rather exiguous vestments of the bath at the behind, and so to gallop forward hand in hand, with penetrating girlish cries,

"*Une personne !*" cried Madame Harry, and the small boy with the long thin calves was lost to sight

The lady with *Napoleon's Mistresses* expelled air forcibly between her lips, remarked in an undertone "*Pouff ! C'est formidable la chaleur,*" and moved up

Madame Harry gave a gruff, "*Ah oui par exemple !*" and continued to appear discouraging

It was at this apparently peaceful moment that a sudden fracas broke out in the rear of the queue Somebody was impatient Somebody was shouting in uncouth vowels Somebody was struggling A great many people were shouting all at once A movement, curiously serpentine, enlivened the queue, a premonitory undulation of impending disturbance The girl, dislodged, turned her head and stood on tiptoe to look down the queue Gary stood on tiptoe and turned his head, but looked at the girl There was quite a commotion now Threats were being hurled and fists shaken at Madame Harry

Madame Harry, suddenly finding her authority in question, flung up her arms and retaliated in a torrent of appeals to logic, and invective This only infuriated the hinder part of the queue, which became more disturbed and more vociferating A heave of humanity travelled right along the queue, as if it were trying to compress itself from behind Another and more violent wave of infuriated urgency followed in its wake, this time irresistibly, so that it pushed everybody forward in a struggling, gesticulating, apologizing mass, which gave vent at intervals to loud complaints There was a very big strong man just behind Gary who dug his heels into the Promenade des Anglais, and, by dint of holding on to the railings and thrusting backwards with all his force, stemmed the tide for one sweating, straining, magnificent instant before he too was overborne and fell with all the weight of the queue behind him upon Gary, who in turn overbalanced helplessly, put out a hand in passing to protect the

girl beside him, knocked the bathing-dress and towel out of her grasp, and found himself falling into the deep yielding mass of the lady in front, who took one half-pace forward, when the force spent itself

"Gee, I'm terribly sorry!" said Gary anxiously to the girl

She threw him half a smile "It is quite all right," she said, in the faintest and most attractive of French accents

He explored her face ardently for signs of damage

"You're positive I didn't hurt you?"

"Positive," she answered

"That's fine," said Gary in tones of slight disappointment "I was afraid I might have" He hesitated, and then added hopefully "I'm afraid I—er—I'm afraid I knocked your things down"

"Yes," she answered "It does not matter"

"I'm terribly sorry," said Gary "I—I—er—I'll pick them up"

He stooped to do so at the same moment that she did, and their heads met in a resounding bump

"*Trois personnes!*" announced the gruff voice of Madame Harry

"Oh my, oh my, oh my!" said Gary, on his haunches

"Mine too," agreed the girl on hers

The large lady with the *Mistresses of Napoleon* had disappeared

"*Encore, deux personnes!*" insisted Madame Harry on a note of threat "*Monsieur et Madame—*"

"I guess I'm one of these loose-limbed guys," said Gary "I really am terribly——"

Madame Harry shook him roughly by the shoulder and thrust two blue tickets under his nose "*Deux personnes!*" repeated Madame Harry over and over again "Is it that Monsieur and Madame desire to bath themselves? Because if not there is much of the world here this afternoon which makes itself greatly impatient!" And, as if to point her words, an excitable hullabaloo rose behind them in chorus

"Oh, thanks," said Gary, coming to "Thanks, madame Er—er—*combrang ça ?*"

"*Dix francs, monsieur*"

"Each ?" asked Gary, waving a finger between the girl and himself to emphasize the point

"*Les deux*," said Madame Harry, holding up two fingers

"I'll take both," he told her, passing a dirty note "One's for me"—he held out one of the tickets towards the girl—"and one's for you With the compliments and apologies of Mrs Williams' little boy Gary"

She laughed "*Merci*, Monsieur Gary, but you should not have done that"

"It'd be worth it," he said, "if I could know yours too"

She looked sideways with a hesitating smile, then she shrugged her shoulders

"Stephanie," she told him "Good-bye !" and went quickly in

"Stephanie !" he whispered to himself, judiciously, and decided, with a wag of his head, that he liked the effect of it enormously He watched her with appreciative eyes as she consulted the pencilled hieroglyphic on her ticket and walked slowly along the line of cabins looking for her number Then he consulted his own ticket, and read the number 27, with a dash across the tail of the seven

Twenty-seven ? Twenty-seven ?

They met at the door of number twenty-seven

"Oh, hello," said Gary "Mine's twenty-seven What's yours ?"

"Twenty-seven," said Stephanie

"What ?" said Gary

She held out her ticket silently

"Good lord !" said Gary

"*Cabine familiale*," explained the girl

"You mean ?"

She nodded

"You mean—we're expected to *share*——"

"She thinks we are married "

"Well, I'm darned !" said Gary reverently

"You think so ?"

"Excuse me," said Gary, blushing, but assuming an expression of great determination "I'll fix it I'll exchange this for a couple of *cabines mondiales* "

He marched grimly across the shingle towards Madame Harry

"*Oh, pardong, madame,*" he began politely, holding out the two tickets "I'm afraid there's been a slight mistake here Both these tickets are numbered twenty-seven "

"*Oui, oui, oui !*" exclaimed Madame Harry, understanding only the number "*Numero vingt-sept ! Allez, allez !*"

"Well, I hate to mention it," said Gary, "but we aren't married "

"*Oui, oui, oui !*" insisted Madame Harry "*Cabine familiale, numero vingt-sept !*"

"I don't think you quite understand," said Gary, beginning again "I know the French are broad-minded, but we don't want a *cabine familiale* What we want is a couple of *cabines mondiales* Now be an angel and fix that for me, will you ?"

"*Oui, oui, oui !*" exclaimed Madame Harry, becoming annoyed "*Cabine familiale ! Cabine mondiale ! C'est la même chose* "

Gary swallowed determinedly He held the two tickets before her face and indicated them forcefully with his finger "Twenty-seven !" said Gary, speaking very loudly and distinctly

Madame Harry exploded There is no other word which could do justice to the sudden burst of idiomatic and furious French and the whirlwind of gesture with which she accompanied it Her eyes rolled Her fingers flew She slapped the blue roll of tickets She pounded her deep chest with her fists She pointed to

the ground beneath her feet, and she finished with a magnificent peroration which drew a round of clapping from the queue

"O K O K *Pardong !*" said Gary meekly, and retreated with a white, worried face and the two unalterable tickets towards number twenty-seven. There was no sign of the girl

"Hey !" said Gary, lifting his voice

The door of the cabin opened and Stephanie appeared in a very small blue suit covered with white anchors

"*C'est à vous,*" she said—"your turn,"—and ran past him down the beach like a—like a—well, like a very beautiful girl in a small bathing-dress

He stood scratching his head and watching her go till she reached the wheeled diving-board in the distance, ran up it, took flight for a moment like a bird, and became simply a brown arm and a white bathing-cap swimming out to sea

She had left the door open. Was it all right? he wondered. He broke into a whistle, ascended the three wooden steps in an aimless way, and took a long, guilty glance about him. Not far away a pale young man and a pale young woman sat side by side, kissing each other frankly on the mouth. A little farther off a bowler hat stood upon a cairn of stones. To the left, the ample lady, whose amplitude he had personally tested, lay on her back and read about the mistresses of Napoleon. His whistle became more carefree. He cocked a contemplative eye at the sky, as if searching for signs of weather. Then he went in and closed the door.

Still whistling, he glanced down his cheek at the neatly folded skirt and the blue bib, and one or two other things, topped by a vanity case, a bracelet and a watch. They were on a wooden bench. On the other side stood another bench. He pulled his singlet over his head, scratched his back with a thumb-nail, put out his tongue at himself in the small glass, kicked off his shoes, stepped out of what he had been

accustomed to call his pants until one term at Oxford had cured him of the habit, assumed a pair of blue woollen drawers with a neat white stripe, folded everything with meticulous neatness, opened the door, thrust out his head, emerged in person, and, still whistling, made his way in the direction of the sea

Now there are some quite strong, likable, not to say loose-limbed, men who are not good bathers Mrs Williams' little boy Gary was one of these Not for all the wealth of the Banque de France would he enter the sea head first As he gingerly explored it with one foot it struck a chill through him like an electric shock Still, he went on In great pain he immersed himself as far as the knees In sheer agony he felt the wet, icy stuff begin its dreadful penetration of the lower part of his trunks The two young persons came and gaily splashed him, with maidenly merriment The drops fell on his body like a fusillade from a machine-gun His jaw trembled, but he went on Each time he did this it was the bravest thing he had ever done At length he nerved himself for excruciating torment, sat down in what seemed a bath of knives, sighed, and broke into a gentle breast-stroke

For a few minutes he swam quietly round till the familiar sense of numbness warned him that if he wished to keep body and soul together he must reach dry land immediately He did not feel cold, he only knew that to the eyes of an observer he must already be looking blue Mrs Williams used to explain the phenomenon by saying that Gary grew too fast He dropped his legs and was reassured to find that he made contact with the ocean bed Parting a way through the water with his hands, he waded ashore, removed the Mediterranean from his ears, ruffled his hair, and ran smartly towards the hut He found it locked

"Locked!" said Gary "Oh, madame!"

"Où, monsieur?"

"Le key, please, to number twenty-seven"

Madame Harry said a great many things in French which he did not understand

"Now listen," said Gary "I don't want to start an argument Just *donnez-moi le key*, will you?"

"*Voyans, voyans, voyans, ces Americains !*" Madame Harry exclaimed with some irritation "*Approchez, monsieur*"

"Just give me the key, will you?" demanded Gary "That's all I want"

For answer she took him grimly by the wrist and led him after her to the door of number twenty-seven She pointed to the Yale keyhole, then pointed to her mouth "*Fermé*," said Madame Harry, speaking with great distinctness"

"Yeah, that's right Locked," he agreed "Just open up, will you?"

Madame Harry pointed to the hook where a key had lately hung upon a piece of string, and then pointed to her throat "*Madame*," she said

"Eh?" said Gary

Madame Harry pointed to her throat again "*Gorge*," she said, enunciating with elaborate movements of the lips

"I don't get you"

"*Gorge, gorge, gorge, gorge, gorge !*"

"You mean, something to eat?"

Madame Harry pointed excitedly to the small boy who had once worn socks, but now, like a tousled rat, came scurrying towards them with a crucifix on a chain about his neck, and in addition, a key upon a piece of string

"*Madame !*" said Madame Harry, waving a manly hand vaguely into the *ewyker*, in a remote part of which the white bathing-cap could be seen still swimming somewhere between the sea and sky

"You mean that's the only key there is?" exclaimed Gary "Gosh ! I'm *cold !*"

He sat down helplessly on the topmost of the three

steps The small boy with the crucifix stood and watched him

"*Vous avez froid ?*" demanded Madame, looking at him with sudden sharpness

"Sure I've got *froid*," said Gary, recognizing the word from the tap

Madame Harry clicked with her teeth several times, and, gazing out to sea towards a white bathing-cap, made deep rolling noises evidently expressive of pity and misapprobation

The ample lady, hearing them, closed her book with a snap, sat upon her elbow, and asked "*Il a froid ?*"

"*Ah oui*," said Madame Harry

The two love-birds came running, excitedly demanding to know what had arrived It was explained to them with voluble detail that Monsieur the American had *froid*, and that Madame his wife was swimming out to sea with the key The ample lady expressed herself as of the opinion that such a thing was insupportable and not to be tolerated The lovers, with a great many reservations, were on the whole inclined to agree

Presently the gentleman with the moustachios, observing, from his position in the surf, that something of moment was under way, emerged from the waters, collected his hat from the place where he had left it, and, raising it politely to all and sundry, demanded to be informed of the *nouvelles* With a wealth of explanatory data the position of affairs was laid before him During the course of the recital the two young females scampered up with serious faces They, too, had to have the whole matter laid before them, and in a few brief instants the group was joined by a very thin gentleman with pince-nez on his nose and a beach ball under his arm, two elderly ladies in black with parasols and bare feet, who had come simply for the paddling, six privates of the Chasseurs Alpins complete with bugles, and, finally, the remaining members of

the queue, who, finding the way open to them, surged in and stood on the confines of the crowd

It was Madame Harry who resolved the problem Thrusting her way through the assembled multitude, she marched with a grim command of the situation down to the water's edge, followed at a respectful distance by about fifty per cent of the onlookers, and, producing from her person a small musical instrument which she described grimly as a *cornet de sauvetage*, she sent a faint tinny blast from it travelling across the sea At the same time she made large, beckoning motions, and the crowd, wishing to be of assistance, made beckoning motions too The white bathing-cap swam on Madame Harry blew again, long and loud, and a childish "Peep" issued over the waters The crowd waved and beckoned frantically

The white bathing-cap saw A brown arm waved and headed towards the shore

The crowd sighed profoundly, and then broke into a happy chatter The situation, it was felt on all sides, had been saved neatly and decisively In about ten times as long as it takes to tell, the errant Stephanie was being greeted at the shore, given a triumphant résumé of events, and escorted up the beach like a conquering hero As the rescue party approached, the crowd about the door of number twenty-seven parted to form a lane A hundred willing hands urged Stephanie more quickly on A hundred willing hands helped to lift the key-string over her head and to disentangle it from her hair A hundred willing hands fumbled with the key and flung the door victoriously open A hundred willing hands helped the horrified Gary to his feet and urged him and the girl into the *cabine familiale* together

"*Voilà, monsieur ! Voilà, madame !*" urged all that was most worldly, most familiar, most helpful of the bourgeoisie of Nice "*Entrez, monsieur ! Entrez, madame !*" they said

"Yes, but——"

"*Entrez ! Entrez ! Entrez !*" they cried "*Dépêchons-nous !*"

"Yes, but gosh darn it ! " Garry yelled above the turmoil "I keep telling you we aren't *married* "

"*Oui, oui !*" they replied enthusiastically
"*Entrez, monsieur* "

A hundred willing hands bundled them in together, closed the door upon them, dusted themselves with the satisfaction of a deed well done, and went away

Garry sat on one of the benches and put his wet head in his hands

"I refuse to apologize again," he said "I regard this as an act of God "

The girl seemed concerned about him

"Why did they send for me ?" she asked

"I got cold, I guess "

"You are cold now ?"

"Never in all my life," said he, "was I so hot and bothered all over What are we going to do ?"

"We could close our eyes," she suggested demurely

He blinked, considered the matter with raised brows, and then nodded several times

"Yeah, we could at that !" he admitted "You know, I'm one of these New England guys "

"Oh," she exclaimed, "you are American ?"

"Yes, sir," he admitted modestly

"Are they tightly shut ?"

"Yes, ma'am ! What did you think I was ?"

He could feel rather than hear her getting to work with a towel beside him

"English," she said

He applied his own with vigour "Oh, that's my Oxford accent It's too fearfully difficult for a cove to avoid picking up the pat-wah "

She smiled—at least he thought she smiled

"You have been there long?"

"A term"

"You are going back?"

"Sure Tonight"

She nodded. At least he thought she nodded

"What about you?" he asked, struggling into his trousers back to front. "You're a French girl?"

"In a way," she told him

"Say, take a look at this, will you?" he exclaimed, indicating his trousers

"You mean that?" she asked cautiously

"No, no!" he said. "Don't open up yet! What kind of a way?"

"I have a nationality of my own," she said in a curiously proud voice, which he only noticed afterwards, when he came to run the scene over again in his head, was a curiously proud voice

"Oh?" he said noncommittally. "Well? Shall we open up now?"

"It is all right for me"

"It's all right with me too. Are you ready?—steady—go!"

They met each other's eyes laughingly

"It would be all right for New England?" she asked

"Not exactly. Want a comb?"

"Yes, please"

He pulled one out of his trousers pocket and wiped it politely for her on his towel

She turned to the little mirror with its advertisement for Dubonnet, and combed her hair

The urge to shuffle his feet was coming on him once again

"Well—er"—he said—"I don't suppose we shall ever meet again——"

"An episode," she murmured to the mirror

"Yeah! That's right! I—er—I've got to go back to Oxford tonight. It's not a term really—just a few dumb Americans putting in extra work in the vacation

—so as to keep abreast of the aborigines, but I've got my berth fixed on the train and everything "

She went on combing her hair

He shuffled his feet "I—er It's been nice knowing you I hope you won't mind my saying—but —I—er—I like you—and in my country—when two people like each other—and think they're never going to meet again—it's customary—er " he hesitated, examining the toe of his foot

"In my country, too," she said, turning her face sideways and half lifting it

"Gosh !" exclaimed Gary "You *mean* that ?" He kissed her enthusiastically on the ear

She opened her eyes "They do this in New England ?"

"In New York, anyway "

She put on her wrist-watch and her ring, rolled her bathing things up in a towel and tucked them under her arm Then she held out her hand

He took it "Good-bye—Steph !" he said

"Good-bye, Monsieur Gary," she answered, smiled, and went down the steps

He called after her "By the way, what is your country ?"

"You may know one of these days That is your *Eclairveur* ?"

"Oh, gee, thanks !" He turned to pick it up from the floor, and, when he had risen from his stoop, she was already passing Madame Harry at the entrance He hurried after her

"*Deux personnes !*" called out Madame Harry, and held up two fingers

Gary told himself later that day that he would have followed the girl if it hadn't been for the expression on the faces of two men who looked him over in a cold and calculating way before they turned and themselves followed her For one absurd moment he thought they looked rather like detectives

CHAPTER TWO

FOR THE REST OF THAT DAY HE THOUGHT ABOUT HER. He thought of her as he drank his Dubonnet outside that little café in the Place Albert Ier, and while he consumed that very unpleasant concoction *bouillabaisse* at the restaurant by the Quai des Etats Unis. He thought of her while he packed his possessions in the little room on the seventh floor of the Hotel Splendid Carlton-Palace (*éclairage électrique*), the canvas slacks, the blue singlet, the very damp pair of blue bathing-shorts with the neat white stripe. He told the clerk about her as he paid the bill, but without mentioning the *cabine familiale*.

"I tell you she was beautiful," said Gary, and, becoming almost Oxonian in his rapture "God, how beautiful she was!"

"That is francs one thousand four hundred and fifty-two," replied the clerk politely, "and fifteen centimes."

"But *proud*!" said Gary. "You know—*regal*! Is it O K about the sleeping reservation?"

"*Oui, oui*, Mr Williams, that is okey-dokey. The *porteur* here, he will go with you."

"*Moi je suis Arab*," said a small man, clad in livery. "You leava to me."

"*Classic*," said Gary to the clerk. "You know what I mean? Kind of regular features. When do we start?"

"You can start now."

"Let's go!"

They started. The little porter, who turned out to be an Arab, flung Gary's two bags on top of an ancient and decrepit bus and mounted the driving-seat himself. They plunged and lurched excitingly through the hinder portions of the town. They arrived in the courtyard of the same station which had seemed so southern

and so romantic to Gary when he arrived, but now seemed merely southern. The blue-bloused porters, seeing the omnibus of the Hotel Splendid Carlton-Palace, hoicked and spat and turned disconsolately away.

The little Arab descended from the vehicle and shinned nimbly up an iron ladder at its back, rescued the two suit-cases, placed them on the ground beside him, and, with dirty, elegant hands, brought forth from his pocket a passport and a blue ticket, bound like a book, with a pencilled yellow slip pinned to its face. "You leava to me," said the Arab briskly. "You follow, please."

He darted into the station carrying the suit-cases, followed by Gary with his long ungainly strides. They clove a way through the ladies who marketed in the long hall, through armies of black-clad families in a condition of immovable despair, dodged bravely among baskets of hens, baskets of peaches and hurrying electric trolleys, stormed the ticket-barrier—all by means of a loud tropical, bird-like cry. On the platform they came upon the Paris train, evil-smelling, dirty, workmanlike, and somehow exhilarating with its aroma of mighty distances.

At the steps of the wagon-lit coach a sleepy Belgian received them gravely in a creased alpaca uniform.

The Arab handed up the ticket with the little yellow slip. The attendant consulted the thumb-marked diagram in his hand. Then he took a pencil from behind his ear to consult it more diagrammatically. Then he read again the number on the yellow ticket. Then he moved his pencil slowly up the diagram as if adding numbers. His mouth drooped into a line of helpless devil-may-care. He murmured something to the Arab. The Arab murmured something in return. The attendant said something else rather more forcefully. The Arab said a great many things very forcibly indeed. The attendant shrugged with his whole body.

The Arab turned to Gary, put one finger to his nose.

with a gesture which was meant to be consoling, and said, "You leava to me "

"Something wrong with the ticket ?" Gary asked

"You leava to me," said the Arab "It is all righ'
Moi je suis Arab You leava to me " He engaged the attendant in animated conversation

The attendant listened gravely for a few moments, and then with an air of helpless finality put away the chart in some container behind the carriage door This seemed to strike frenzy into the heart of the Arab, who dropped both suit-cases so that he might call passionate attention to the matter with both arms

An Englishman with raglan sleeves stopped in his pacing, took the pipe out of his mouth, and said, "What's up ?"

"How the hell do I know ?" Gary answered "Seems there's something wrong with my ticket "

"Ah," observed the Englishman wisely

A very, very old woman, carrying a gaily decorated child's ball in a black string-bag, also stopped and gnashed interestedly with her toothless gums

"There would be," said the Englishman "What else would you expect of these bloody French ?"

"I believe you've got something there," said Gary

A peasant with an immense load on his back stopped and lit a cigarette with one hand Then came a party of schoolgirls in charge of a nun

The wagon-lit attendant was now replying on behalf of the company He spoke gravely and slowly, without passion, but as if the deep development of inexorable logic underlay his words He pointed to the badge on his cap He pointed to the train He pointed to the station clock He took a large watch out of his pocket and pointed to that He brought the diagram from behind the door and indicated it with a superb sweep of his hand The crowd hung upon his words as one man Taking a deep breath and swelling himself up, he advanced upon his peroration, he reached it, paused

for one pregnant moment, wagged an emotional forefinger at the grimy vaulted glass roof, gave vent to one long tremendous resounding phrase, and then stood in his doorway with folded arms

"Oh, jolly good!" said the Englishman

The little Arab turned. He was a beaten man. "I am sorry, monsieur, it is not all right. There 'ave been some mistake."

"All right," said Gary dangerously. "Then I demand the President of the French Republic."

"Good for you, old boy," said the Englishman.

"You leava to me," agreed the Arab, suddenly darting away through the throng.

The Englishman and Gary looked at each other.

Very shortly afterwards a silk hat might have been observed moving steadily towards them through the outer confines of the group.

"My God, you've got him!" said the Englishman, amazed.

Shortly afterwards a way was made, and a tall gentleman in a frock coat emerged, engaged in voluble argument with the little Arab. The little Arab indicated Gary.

Gary removed his hat. "Are you the President of the French Republic?" he demanded.

"Give him hell," grumbled the Englishman into the stem of his pipe.

The distinguished Frenchman removed his silk hat gallantly, replaced it, and then inclined his head for a fresh statement of the position from the Arab. He muttered something in reply. The Arab turned to Gary, licking his lips as interpreters do.

"He says very nice *couchette* for you."

"*Couchette*?"

"Very nice bed. Very clean, very comfortable, very nice sheet."

"Yeah, I know," said Gary. "Wagon-lit."

"No, no, not wagon-lit. *Couchette*. The same thing."

but different Monsieur does not undress for the night "

"Bed bugs ?"

"Women," said the Englishman

"Monsieur is a man of the world You like to see ?"

"Lead on," said Gary

"I say, old boy, would you like me to come with you ?" suggested the Englishman behind his hand "I mean, you never know, on these French trains——"

"You follow, please," said the Arab

The President of the French State Railways led the way, the Arab came second, Gary third, the Englishman fourth Behind them trooped the great part of the male population of Nice with their womenfolk urging them on from a safe distance in the rear They entered a carriage door, walked along a corridor, squeezed into a compartment, and observed two bunks one on top of the other

"Do I sleep in both of these ?" Gary asked

"It is not necessary," said the Arab "It is all right ? Monsieur will take ?"

"Me like velly well topside," said Gary "Does the President want a tip ?"

"One hundred francs You lcava to me "

"A hundred f—— !"

"Give 'em fifty between the two," muttered the Englishman

Gary fumbled in his pocket The President of the French State Railways looked out of one window, the Arab porter looked out of the other

"Don't be an ass, my dear man," hissed the Englishman

Gary took his fingers off the hundred-franc note in his case and withdrew a pink fifty Then he searched in his pocket for a few loose francs He had none The Arab continued to look out of his window and the President of the French State Railways out of his

One of the nuns, who was by now standing in the doorway, held out her hand with a mute and piteous appeal

Gary took the hundred francs and gave it to the Arab "Pour les twa"

The President of the French State Railways bowed
The nun curtseyed The Arab said, "You leava to me
Good-bye, monsieur"

"Damned bad for the morale, if you ask me,"
observed the Englishman And all four of them left

A whistle sounded, followed by a deafening escape
of steam, to be followed in its turn by a playful jolt,
which, starting from the engine, travelled down the
train carriage by carriage, clanking the couplings and
jerking the passengers off their feet At the same time
a pungent, penetrating odour of hot urine was passed
through pipes along the train, and released in each
compartment, for the benefit of the travellers, from
the heating apparatus beneath the seats The next
thing Gary noticed was that a burly porter flung open
the door of the compartment, marched to the window
and flung that open too, and received three un-
distinguished-looking suit-cases, which he placed, with
a grunt for each, on the lower berth Then he closed
the window and withdrew The next moment the
train backed with extraordinary violence into the
buffers, hesitated for a moment as if the driver were
uncertain as to which handle to pull next, and began
to sidle in a dignified and encouraging manner out of
the station It was then that the door of the compart-
ment opened again and an exclamation made him
whip round violently He swallowed six times and
removed his hat

"Say!" exclaimed Gary "Look who's here!"

"You arranged this on purpose?" demanded
Stephanie

He frowned suddenly, his gaze directed just beyond
and above her head Through the open door of the
corridor he had just seen the same two men pass
unostentatiously who had caught his attention that
afternoon on the promenade at Nice

CHAPTER THREE

"ON PURPOSE?" GARY ECHOED VAGUELY "SAY, ARE you being followed or something?"

She closed the door behind her "Never mind that You have come here on purpose?"

"Now, sister, *would* I do a thing like that?"

She studied his face seriously "No," she admitted "You come from the Middle West"

"Pardon me," he corrected her, "New England And what's more this French morality is getting me down"

"It is too *mondiale*?"

"If I have to sleep in a wagon-lit they'll run the train half empty before they'll commingle the sexes But if you tip the President of the French Republic thirty-three point three recurring francs for one of these *couchettes*---"

She looked puzzled "The President of the Republic?"

"Let it go" He jerked his head towards the small door in the side of the compartment "What's in there?"

"You could go and see"

He nodded, and opened the door The place contained one washbasin, four tooth-glasses, four empty carafes of water, a mirror, and a box for towels He inspected these properties with a calculating eye, emerged, and with a purposeful expression began to haul down a mattress and the two brown blankets from the upper berth He rolled them into an unwieldy bundle and flung them on the floor of the lavabo "No more shut-eyes for little Gary," he told her grimly "This is where I pass the night How long does it take you to get into bed?"

She seemed to be resisting the temptation to smile
"Ten minutes?" she suggested seriously

"I'll smoke two cigarettes in the corridor," he told her, "and then good night all"

He went out into the corridor, closed the door on her, and, stooping to avoid the roof, shook his head several times to himself, took a packet of cigarettes out of his hip pocket, selected one, and said to it breathlessly and confidentially, "Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy!" Then he leaned on the brass rail provided, struck a match on the window-pane, lit his cigarette, inhaled deeply, blew out the match with all that was left of the smoke, shook his head again with a certain modest rapture, and then suddenly noticed that his two friends were unostentatiously smoking together a little further down the corridor

He narrowed his eyes at them. They were smallish, dressed in subfusc grey, and they leaned with their elbows on the brass rail and talked in undertones. One was bald-headed and wore a beard. It was a spade beard, but not otherwise suspicious. The other's hair was grizzly, and save for something rather blobbish about the end of his nose, possessed features of quietly intelligent distinction. He wore a white slip in the V of his waistcoat, Gary noticed, and the gold monocle, which dangled from a cord about his neck, kept up a steady tinkle upon the rail with the movement of the train until he rescued it and slipped it in his breast pocket.

Could this be coincidence? he wondered. He went on quietly with his own cigarette, and watched them suspiciously out of the corner of his eye. The train hurried along through the darkness. From time to time somebody passed unsteadily along the corridor—a scented lady with a little dog, a Frenchman in cap and carpet slippers, with a long cigarette-holder in his mouth. When that happened the droning voices of the two men stopped while they politely flattened their

backsides to permit passage One of the passers was the Englishman

"Oh, hullo, old boy!"

"Hello," Gary said

"Women?"

"Yeah"

"Monsieur will not undress Monsieur is a man of the world Night, night, old boy Sleep tight Wake sober"

Gary flung away his second cigarette and went in Only a little blue light glowed in the middle of the ceiling, so that for a moment he could not see

"Are you in bed?" he whispered softly

"Yes," she answered

"Nice work" (Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy) "Is there—is there anything you want?"

"A little conversation, perhaps?"

"No," he said, "I guess not We'll save it for the morning"

"As you please," she answered

"Now get this, Stephanie! This has nothing whatever to do with what I please! It's my high moral code"

"Of course," she answered

He hesitated and then whispered, almost to himself "You know, I wish I *knew* you"

Did she smile in the half darkness?

"But you do"

"I wish I knew who you were," he hesitated "Who are you, and what are those two guys outside?"

"Oh," she murmured "So they are outside?"

"Do you want them thrown off the train?"

"I would not bother"

There was one of those pauses

"I hope you won't mind my saying this," Gary said suddenly "I've got a sister at home That's a darned pretty nightgown you're wearing"

There was another of those pauses

"You like it?"

"I think it's *swell*!" said Gary enthusiastically
"Well"

"Well"

"I hope you'll sleep all right"

"And you?"

"Oh, I'll be fine Well—good night"

"Good night"

"Good night"

"Good night"

He waited for her to say something else, then retired into the lavabo and closed and locked the door

As a lavabo it may have served, but as sleeping-quarters it was restricted By dint of standing on the bundle of mattress and blankets he was able to remove his coat and collar and tie Her toothbrush, he noticed, romantically, was in one of the glasses Then he set about making arrangements for the night At first he tried propping the mattress up on the basin and vaulting on to it before it fell over But in several attempts it fell over every time, and at the last the whole thing slid off with himself on top of it, and he hurt his shoulder-blade on one of the taps Then he tried folding the mattress double on the floor, and curling himself round upon it like a whiting, but that, too, was not altogether satisfactory In the end he found it best to lie on his back on the floor with his feet propped vertically against the basin, using the mattress for a pillow

The train rattled and banged The toothbrush in the tooth-glass kept up a sympathetic vibration After a short interval her voice came to him through the door

"It is all right for one of those loose-limbed guys?"

He did not answer but only smiled, and fell into a reverie It may be that he fell into a sort of sleep

The next thing he knew was a violent disturbance set up in the door-handle near his ear For some little .

time he was aware of this, but thought it one of those noises inseparable from railway travel in a foreign country. Then he became aware that someone was trying to get in, that somebody, in fact, was making a frantic onslaught upon the door with his fist, and shouting "*Ouvrez, ouvrez !*" in the accents of passionate necessity. He struggled into a hasty sitting position, suddenly realizing that crisis was at hand and that the place had two doors, one for the compartment on either side.

"All right, all right, all right !" said Gary as loudly as he dared. "For God's sake hold it !"

He stealthily unlocked the door which led into his own compartment, and opened it an inch or two. The blue light still glowed. It was quite quiet. He gathered up his belongings and tottered with them on tiptoe into the presence of the sleeping girl. He eased them gently on to the upper bunk and then, when everything seemed ready, crept back to the lavabo, slipped open the opposite bolt, and shut his own door almost in the same second. Grateful sounds told him that the occupancy had already been taken over. Then he found the three little wooden steps, climbed up by them on to his berth, and, in a tangle of suit-cases and a half-rolled mattress and raddled blankets, was presently asleep.

. . .

It was morning when he awoke. Leaden rain beat against the window. It made watery patterns in the soot. It was cold in the compartment. The sunshine of Nice had been left behind. For a while he lay, his head pillowed in his hands, in a half-waking state, thinking of the three weeks he had spent in that sunshine, thinking, in the end, of Harry's Plage.

Suddenly he remembered. Stephanie was down below.

"Gosh!" thought Gary, making words for himself
"What does A do now?"

The answer was in the advertisement. It seemed as tactful a way of announcing his presence as any other. He lit a Camel. When he judged the compartment was sufficiently redolent of this to give unmistakable warning of masculine presence to any impressionable girl, he began also to hum "Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you. Happy *birth*day—to—*you*——"

.He looked over the side. The bunk below was empty.

CHAPTER FOUR

THERE WAS SOMETHING ABOUT THAT EMPTY BUNK which was as gaping and vacant as a recent shellhole. Its effect was to convince him momentarily that Stephanie had gone, not only from her bunk, but from the actual train as well, and so out of his life. Then he smiled. Of course! Now there was a grand, tactful girl, with clean personal habits! She had gone into the lavabo to wash so that he might have a free run of the compartment.

He bounded out of his bunk quite blithely at this thought, knocked on the door, and said, "Good morning, sister," in cheerful, early-morning tones.

Then, glad of the opportunity, he stripped to the skin, did a few simple exercises to get the sleep out of his system, and donned completely fresh clothes. After that he felt better, so, being a tactful guy himself, he knocked on the door again.

"You can come out now," he said. "I'll be doing the faithful watch-dog act in the corridor. It's a swell morning."

This was a pardonable exaggeration. It was, in fact, a detestable morning, and as he stood in the corridor and waited for ten minutes, for twenty minutes, for thirty minutes, with the dirty rain rattling like hail against the window, and a bleak prospect of steam, sidings and grey slates, a doubt began to gnaw at his vitals.

When he had waited thirty-five minutes he knocked on the door of the compartment, opened it and looked in. It had a wind-swept and desolate air, as if it had been unoccupied for months. He frowned. He went to the lavabo door and put his ear against it. It seemed ominously quiet.

"Oh, Stephanie!" he called out

Silence He tried the handle The door yielded immediately The place was as empty as the other Even the toothbrush had gone from the glass He whirled round at that Three suit-cases had departed too

Then again the optimism of youth provided an answer The dining-car! Already they were running into the outskirts of Paris Naturally, the wagon-lit attendant had collected the bags in readiness

"Gary," said Gary, "you're a fool"

He shaved in two different sorts of cold water, damped his unruly hair with a little more, combed and brushed himself carefully, packed his bag and shut it for the attendant Then, lurching from side to side, he picked his way towards the dining-car

She was not in the dining-car either, but the two men were They occupied the first table near the door, with table-napkins tucked firmly into their collars, and a large bowl of hot chocolate each, which they were tackling with preoccupied enthusiasm

A waiter hurried up "Good morning, sir! American breakfast, sir? Orange juice? Quaker oats?"

"No," said Gary "Have you seen a young lady?"

"Young lady, sir? Could you describe her, sir?"

"Well—she's strikingly beautiful, and—er——"

"No, sir!"

"You're certain of that?"

"I am positive, sir!" declared the waiter, eying an English girl spreading marmalade on a piece of toast

"Hell!" said Gary loudly, and rushed away, far too urgently to notice that the two mysterious gentlemen were clutching their napkins and had half risen to their feet

He ran wildly through the train, peering through open doorways, bowling over a woman with tweeds,

wasting as little time as possible over helping her up and an almost instantaneous apology, raced on until he reached his own coach, where he skidded into the attendant and shook that astonished official roughly by the shoulders

"*Mademoiselle !*" he shouted "*Mademoiselle !* Where is *mademoiselle ?*"

"*Mademoiselle ?*" repeated the astonished man

He dragged him into the compartment and waved at the deserted bunk "Where the blazes is she ? You ought to know ! Did she get off the train ?"

"She 'ave gone ?"

"Think, blockhead, think ! Did you carry away her suit-cases in the night ?"

"*Mais non !* Nobody 'ave get off ! It is the Paris train !"

The train slowed

"*Paris ?*"

"*Mais oui, monsieur ! On arrive toute a l'heure !*"

"God ! Give me those suit-cases ! Here !" He thrust francs into the flabbergasted fellow's hand, dived into an overcoat, crammed a hat on his head, grabbed the two suit-cases, and crashed along to the door at the end of the coach

The train was already running along beside the platform When it had slowed to little more than a run he slipped off it, tumbled, recovered his balance, and began pounding down the platform after it If he had waited a little he would have arrived there sooner, but as it was he was first at the ticket-barrier, breathless but determined, with minutes to spare

The ticket-collector was facetious "*Oho ! Brava ! Magnifique ça ! Prochainne fois, il faut doubler le train Bleu !*"

"Yeah," said Gary, not understanding a word, and panting "Does everybody come by here ?"

"*On peut courrir partout, mais les voyageurs par train . passent par ici*"

They did From first to last But the girl was not among them

"Say, did that train stop anywhere between Marseilles and Paris?"

"*Non, monsieur*"

"You mean to say it runs right through from Marseilles to Paris without a stop?"

"*Certainement, monsieur! Sauf pour amener de l'eau*"

"*Eau?* That's water"

"*Oui, monsieur*"

"It stops for water?"

"*Oui, monsieur, à Dijon*"

"Dijon!" yelled Gary triumphantly "Thanks, pal," and hurled himself, looking rather like a queer bird in flight with a suit-case in each hand, and his overcoat flapping, in the direction of the ticket-office He banged on the wooden shutter furiously "Dijon! Dijon!" he called out "Hey there! Look alive, will you, somebody?"

The shutter was rushed up in his face

"Dijon!" said Gary

A ticket was slapped at him He flung down his wallet, trusting the man to hand back the proper change "Thanks," said Gary "Platform?"

"Cinq"

"Uh?" said Gary

"Five"

"O K!"

"*Dijon, deux,*" said a voice behind him

He was just about to take instant flight and had indeed actually made about three preliminary steps, when something about the sound of that voice made him turn his head Then he stopped dead in his tracks The two little men were together at the *guichet*, and it occurred to him, with a sudden and most unpleasant feeling of certainty, that he was being followed He pushed his hat back off his forehead to consider this

problem, and then, the original urgency supervening, turned again and ran for the platform with a deadly serious look on his face

The train was one of those quaint little trains which run about France in two stories, with seats for anyone who cherishes a desire for a prospect and a whiff of coal-smoke on the roof. Inside, Gary found himself among workpeople with vast blue bundles, in a coach which was open above the partitions from end to end. Every seat was filled to overflowing. Gary wedged himself just inside one of the doors. In this position he found that he blocked the window, but by doubling down he could just take a sight of the platform beneath his left armpit.

In this position he saw the two men hurry down the platform and enter the same coach three doors further down. He lifted his head and looked along the top of the partitions. He could just see their hats eddying in a swirl of other hats, and hear gruff sounds of expostulation as they, like himself, were forced to stand. A pale girl in black prodded his knee diffidently and indicated that there was room for one of his suit-cases on the floor beside her feet. He grinned his thanks but retained the suit-case. At that moment the guard blew on a tin trumpet very much like Madame Harry's and the train began to move.

"Excuse me," said Gary to the girl loudly. "Does this train go to Marseilles?"

"*Marseilles*?" cried the occupants of the compartment in horrified unison. "*Sautez, monsieur! Sautez!*"

They rose to the situation like one man. They undid the door for him, they turned him about, they made sure his hat was securely crammed on his head, they seized his suit-cases and flung them out, then they launched him, too, into space, slammed the door on him, and rushed to the open window to wave their *adieux*.

- From his seat on the platform where he had fallen

he waved after them, and when he caught sight of two heads thrust suddenly out of a window five doors further down the train, he kissed his hand to them. The flat end of the little train receded out of sight.

Only one of the suit-cases was at all seriously damaged, and Gary himself, apart from where he had kicked his ankle in falling, was intact. Six delighted porters and the old lady from the news-stall dusted him and brushed him and straightened his hat and satisfied themselves of the fact. He demanded a taxi. They were vastly amused by the gentleman who had been going to Dijon and had altered his mind, and hooted about it a great deal, and told one another how *drole* it was. But they led him to one, with quite a family-party air, and slung his suit-cases on to the roof.

"Thanks, everybody," said Gary, and, to the taxi-driver, "Dijon."

"*Hôtel de Dijon*?"

"No," said Gary. "Dijon."

"*Oui, oui!*" said the taxi-driver. "*Place de Dijon*."

"No," said Gary. "*Dijon!*"

"*Dijon*?" repeated the taxi-driver, his jaw dropping.

"Yes," said Gary. "What's the matter? Can't you get that far?"

"*Mais! Dijon!*" exclaimed the taxi-driver. "*Quatre cent kilometres!*"

"And don't spare the horses!"

The taxi-driver raised both arms and about six overcoats, blew through his moustache, turned to face the onlookers, raised both his arms again, grimaced expressively, sighed, did sundry expensive-looking things to his meter whereby Tarif I was replaced by Tarif II, to be in turn succeeded by Tarif III, and clambered aboard. One sickening lurch, and they were off.

They rattled through the streets of Paris just like any other cab. Half an hour later they bucked and bounded through the atrocious suburbs. An hour later they toiled through the streets of Fontainebleau with a stiff head of steam spurting from the radiator. In the town itself, before the courtyard of the palace of the kings, the driver stopped by a drinking fountain, clambered painfully down and began the long process of baling water into his mount by means of a small brass cup attached to the foot of a fat Psyche by a chain. Gary took the opportunity to buy some chocolate in an *épicerie*. It was when coming out of this place that he first noticed the Delage.

It was a very noble car. It flaunted some kind of naked nymph in front, and it dominated the street-scene with that overwhelming impression of expensive elegance which the French know so well how to achieve. It was an open coupé, and in the driver's seat sat a genial man with a big grey beard who wore a beret on his head and seemed to Gary to be regarding him with the same sort of expression of jovial superiority which a mouse must recognize in the cat.

The taxi stood deserted by the fountain, so Gary did what he had seen many Frenchmen do in similar circumstances, pounded the rubber bulb of the horn. Presently his driver came running, full of apologies and adjusting his dress, from one of those small circular tin enclosures built about a tree-trunk. There was a loud rending sound as he engaged his gear, another of those upheaving lurches, and they shook the dust of Fontainebleau from beneath their chariot wheels. Something made Gary turn to look through the window behind him.

A hundred yards away and separated from them by a bus, a tramcar and two bicycles, the Delage was quietly in motion.

Ten minutes later, when they were rocketing down a long straight road at a hectic thirty-five kilometres

an hour, the Delage was visible half a kilometre behind them

One hour later it was still half a kilometre behind

An hour and a half later they had a puncture in one of their tyres, and pulled in to the side of the road

Two hundred yards behind them the Delage did the same

Gary had to get out of the cab because the tools were under the seat. While his faithful Jehu grovelled in the dust he strolled back in a casual manner towards the other car. Its bearded occupant had lit a cigar and was lounging back in his seat with his eyes closed. Gary stopped as he came abreast of him, and then, rather provocatively perhaps, walked slowly all round the car. It was a nice car. Then he poked his head over the door and studied the instruments on the dashboard. The bearded gentleman gave no sign. Gary took a cigarette out of his pocket and thoughtfully struck a match on the side of the car. Then, hearing frantic squawks from the taxi's horn, he sauntered back along the road and they set forth once again. The Delage followed.

They lunched at Sens, in the only reasonable hostelry of the place, with the Delage and the taxi parked one behind the other outside the *mairie*, and the bearded gentleman, who obtained much better service than they did, lunching efficiently in the opposite corner.

By four o'clock they had covered a further seventy kilometres, and the Delage was still half a kilometre behind.

At a place called Avallon they stopped to fill up with *essence*. So did the Delage.

At Semur they halted, momentarily, to visit another of those circular tin shelters in the main square. When they emerged a distinguished man with a beard and a beret met them at the entrance, said "*Pardon*" and went in.

At Blaisy, Gary rapped on the window and signalled.

the cab to stop. A moment later the Delage slumped to rest behind them with bumpers almost touching.

Gary got out and walked up to the man. "Say!" he demanded. "Are you following me?"

"I understand," replied the gentleman courteously, "that this is the road to Dijon?"

"You know damned well it's the road to Dijon!"

"The road," said the gentleman, "is, is it not, a public road?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Gary. "Now I understand. You're going to Dijon!"

"So it would appear, my friend."

"And this is the road to Dijon?"

"Oui."

"And this is a public road?"

"Ah oui."

"Well, don't let me keep you," said Gary, stepping back a pace as if to get out of the way.

The gentleman hesitated a second and then removed his beret with a flourish and a little smile. "You are very kind," he said, backed a few paces, turned his wheel, and shot away like an arrow from a bow.

For a minute or two Gary and the taxi-driver stood and watched him become a mere speck in the distance on the ten-mile stretch of road.

"Alley-oop," Gary said, and clambered aboard.

"Alley-oop," said the driver, gnashing his gears.

It was growing dark when they clattered at last through the streets of the old town of Dijon and pulled up before the neat little trees in buckets and the tables and chairs of the Hôtel Lion d'Or. At once two page-boys with gloves under their epaulettes, a porter in a striped waistcoat and a white apron, and a few dozen passers-by gathered round in amazement at the sight of an American *milor* who arrived by Paris taxi.

Seeing them, the driver removed his hat, mopped

his forehead, and muttered in a loud stage-whisper from under the corner of his moustache, "*Neuf cent soixante-quinze francs*"

A perceptible tremor ran through the crowd. When Gary dismounted it was felt on all hands that this was a great moment, evidently, in the history of Dijon.

Was she here? Gary scarcely noticed the moment of history, but he looked rather reverently at Dijon, at the coloured roof of the great cathedral, at the criss-cross of tramwires, at the street lamps darkening the dusk, and felt that the place was in some way hallowed. At six o'clock that morning while he had been asleep Stephanie—he already called her Stephanie to himself—had slipped away from him, in this very town. Perhaps she had come round the corner there, by the cathedral. A few hours ago she must have seen its roof and the criss-cross of tramwires. She might be—he gulped—she might be in this very— The Hôtel Lion d'Or, eh? Gosh! If only. He started towards the door, and was met by an anxious and apologetic person in striped trousers.

"Alas, monsieur! Monsieur wishes to sleep for the night?"

"Say, listen! Have you got an extremely beautiful girl here?"

"Monsieur?"

"Oh—er—I mean I want a room and a bath."

"Alas, monsieur! It is exceptional, I promise monsieur that it is quite exceptional, but for some reason, monsieur. Alas, monsieur—tonight."

A great light of hope broke over Gary. He trembled at the possibility.

Did these things ever happen in threes? He gripped the fellow's arm excitedly. "*You mean you haven't got a room?*"

"Alas, monsieur, the hotel is full! But——"

"Go on, go on!"

"But we have a very comfortable *Salon de Thé*, .

monsieur We could place you there a bed If monsieur would be content, just for one night, to share "

He knew it ! He knew it ! The thing was going to happen again ! Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy !

"We are extremely sorry, monsieur It would be just for the one night If monsieur would not have objections, we could place a screen——"

"Place all the screens you want," said Gary "Make it snappy, will you ? Which way do we go ?"

"*Par ici, monsieur !*"

The reception clerk dodged round, bowing, and led the way with such briskness that he banked slightly on his turns

Behind him Gary strode, biting his underlip and pale with excitement Behind him hurried the striped waistcoat with the two suit-cases They marched smartly through the hall, approached the lift, turned from it, went to the left down a dark passage and through a door at the end with glass panels Inside the room three gentlemen stood smartly to attention as he entered They were, reading from left to right, the first gentleman whom he had seen in the train, the second gentleman whom he had seen in the train, and the owner of the Delage

It was the owner of the Delage who bowed, fingered the lapel of his coat, took one pace forward, and constituted himself the spokesman

"Good evening, monsieur," he began

"Hey !" exclaimed Gary "What is all this ? Who are you, anyway ? Because if any of you guys are thinking of starting a rough-house around here——"

"Permit me," replied the gentleman "I am the proprietor of the Hôtel du Palais of Monte Cristo I am also the President of the *Syndicat d'Initiative* I have the honour to announce myself, Monsieur Simon Reynaud The gentleman on my right is Monsieur André Luchard, the manager of the Casino and of the

International Sporting Club My other friend is Monsieur Carlo Rossi, the President of the *Société des Bains de Mer*, the owners of the foreshore "

All three gentlemen bowed

"How do you do ?" said Gary, grimly

"And now, monsieur," continued M Reynaud, "you have the advantage of us Might we enquire——"

"Sure !" agreed Gary "Williams Gary Williams "

"*Enchante !*" murmured M Reynaud politely "You are—forgive me—you are rich ?"

'Hell, no !' said Gary "When I've paid my taxi fare I shall be exactly nine hundred and seventy-five francs to the just too bad "

The three gentlemen exchanged glances

"I see," said Gary "Foiled !"

"Monsieur !" M Reynaud seriously advanced a further step forward "You are, I think, looking for a certain young lady."

"And what if I am ?"

"We, also, are looking for a certain young lady "

"Oh, you are !" exclaimed Gary "Then let me tell you ——"

"Pardon, monsieur," interrupted M Reynaud suavely "Our intentions are of the most noble We have a very great interest indeed in the young lady It is for that reason that we have attempted never to let her out of our sight Unfortunately, monsieur, during last night she disappeared You will forgive us, monsieur, I am sure, if we say that it is for that reason that we took the liberty of keeping, shall we say, in touch with you, since we felt, from one or two things we had observed, that you also took an interest in the young lady "

Gary was silent

"You do take an interest in the young lady ?" persisted M Reynaud

"All right," admitted Gary "I'm interested So what ?"

"You like this young lady ? You are *attracted* by her ?"

"Well," Gary decided, with sudden defiance, "if you want it you may as well have it ! I think she's the sweetest, prettiest, neatest, daintiest, adorablest girl I ever met ! What's more, she has pleasant personal habits I think she's a *swell girl* !"

"How much," suggested M Reynaud diffidently, "would you take to marry this girl ?"

PART TWO

CHAPTER FIVE

THE LITTLE GILT CLOCK ON THE MANTELPiece PINGED eight times

Gary stared first at the bald-headed gentleman with the spade beard, then at the grizzled one with the gold monocle, and then at the debonair figure of M Reynaud smiling at him, with his head and beard a little to one side, tapping well-manicured finger-nails

"*Would you mind repeating that ?*"

"With pleasure," agreed M Reynaud "I repeat How much will you take to marry the girl ?"

"*On the level ?*"

The three gentlemen bowed

"*Yes, but——*"

"I would suggest five hundred down, five thousand immediately after marriage, and five thousand a year for life "

Gary took a firm grip of a potted fern "Francs or dollars ?"

"Pounds," said M Reynaud "With, of course, a suite at the Hôtel du Palais at any time you require——"

"And, of course, entry into the Casino or the International Sporting Club whenever you wish," added the grizzled one, making a pendulum of his monocle

"And, of course, free admission to all the bathing beaches of the Principality," completed the third

Once again Gary peered from one to the other "Would somebody mind pinching me ?"

"We are in earnest, monsieur "

"Wait a minute ! Wait a minute, now ! Let's start over *You want me to marry the girl ?*"

"If you would be so kind," said M Reynaud

"And you're willing to pay *me* five hundred pounds

down, five thousand pounds after marriage, and five thousand pounds a year for the rest of my natural life ?”

“Exactly,” said M Reynaud “With, of course, a suite——”

“Yeah, yeah I know,” interrupted Gary “*Am I crazy, or are you ?*”

The three gentlemen exchanged glances and smiled

“Perhaps,” began M Reynaud gently, “I had better explain It is a little matter of history Shall we sit down ? Or perhaps—monsieur has dined ?”

“No,” said Gary “No, I haven’t ”

“We shall have dinner,” declared M Reynaud He went towards the fireplace and pulled three times on an old-fashioned bell

Almost immediately the glass doors clattered open, and two waiters entered, pushing two trolleys, one of which, when extended, formed a table laid for four, while the other bore encouraging traces of *pâté de foie gras* and champagne

“To dine well in France,” observed M Reynaud, “one must be the manager of a rival hotel Now,” he continued when they were all sitting down, “in the year eighteen ninety-four His Hereditary Highness Prince Albert of Monte Cristo was blessed with a daughter, Princess Christine When His Serene Highness died in nineteen hundred and six this Princess Christine became Her Hereditary Highness Princess Christine of Monte Cristo You follow me ?”

“Easy, so far,” said Gary “Go right ahead ”

“In nineteen-fourteen, Her Hereditary Highness Princess Christine married a French captain of artillery of noble family, and in the year nineteen-eighteen a daughter was born, at whose birth, I am sorry to say, Her Hereditary Highness Princess Christine died ”

“Too bad,” said Gary, “but I get you So this child is now Her Hereditary Highness——”

“Princess Stephanie of Monte Cristo ”

Gary did the nose trick with his champagne

"Gentlemen ! Gentlemen, do not disturb yourselves ! Pray remain seated ! I will occupy myself with this !" said M Reynaud, patting Gary on the back with one hand and offering him a table-napkin with the other "Please, gentlemen, I assure you it will pass !"

"I can take it," said Gary in a strangled voice, and went into a paroxysm of coughing

M Reynaud took the opportunity to move towards the fireplace and ring once again upon the bell The waiters entered, removed the dishes, and returned immediately with most excellent turtle soup

"I may proceed ?" asked M Reynaud solicitously "Thank you Unfortunately, in the year eighteen ninety-six His Serene Highness Prince Albert divorced his wife, and contracted a matrimonial alliance with a *marchande de vin* of Nice, who accordingly became Her Hereditary Highness Princess Hermione of Monte Cristo "

"Does everyone who marries a hereditary highness become a hereditary highness ?" Gary asked

"Heredity," answered M Reynaud calmly, "is a very remarkable thing Now this Princess Hermione gave birth in eighteen ninety-six——"

"You said he only married her in eighteen ninety-six "

"Heredity," repeated M Reynaud, "is a very remarkable thing Three months after they were married Her Hereditary Highness Princess Hermione gave birth to a son, and since a male child by a second marriage takes precedence over a female child by a first, he became His Hereditary Highness Prince Alexis of Monte Cristo, and died in the war "

"Died fighting, eh ?" said Gary

"Drinking, monsieur," corrected M Reynaud

"Oh "

"I have already remarked that heredity is very strange He left a son who was born in nineteen-fourteen, and is still alive, and who is therefore "

"I know, I know His Hereditary Highness

"Prince Paul of Monte Cristo "

"And are all these people sitting on the hereditary throne of Monte Cristo ?"

"None of them are," said M Reynaud gravely "In the first place they are all of them dead, with the exception of His Hereditary Highness Prince Paul and Her Hereditary Highness Princess Stephanie, and in the second place, since there was some hesitation in Monte Cristo as to which of these two Hereditary Highnesses had the prior claim to the princely throne, a certain group of people organized a little revolution at the end of the war " M Reynaud spoke these last words with what might have been described, coming from a less distinguished and diplomatic gentleman, as a smirk

"Oh, they did, did they ?" Gary said

"It was a very modest little affair," said M Reynaud with a shrug

"Altogether Girondin," said the bald gentleman deprecatingly

"Scarcely worthy of the name revolution at all," amended the gentleman with the monocle modestly

"More of a rearrangement," corrected M Reynaud

"Purely technical "

"Exactly," agreed M Reynaud "A little group of business people felt that perhaps the time was ripe for Monte Cristo to be governed by *business men* Some sole ?"

"Thanks," said Gary

"Some sole for monsieur ! For twenty years the arrangement has worked quite admirably The yearly statements of the Casino, of the *Société des Bains de Mer* and the Hôtel du Palais, which was, of course, the old Prince's palace, have disclosed a profit which has quadrupled itself during the period under review "

"I still don't see——" Gary began

"We arrive at the point," M Reynaud assured him

suavely "The common people of Monte Cristo are still addicted to Royalty It is very unfortunate that His Hereditary Highness Prince Paul has obtained a dispensation from His Holiness the Pope which will enable him to marry Her Hereditary Highness Princess Stephanie in about three months from this date "

Gary put down his fork with a clatter "You mean they're engaged to be married ?"

"It is essential to us," M Reynaud explained, "that this marriage shall not take place If the two claimants to the hereditary throne are allowed to unite their claims in this manner their joint claim will make an irresistible appeal to the population Speaking frankly, monsieur, I cannot afford to see the Hôtel du Palais turned back into a royal residence The *Société des Bains de Mer* has sunk capital to the extent of a hundred thousand pounds in a rubber bathing beach which they have no wish to see included in a royal garden It is the interests of the populace which we have at heart, monsieur Are we to surrender one of the last democracies in Europe to a hereditary dictatorship ? Never ! And we have a wider duty Are we to abandon the last refuge, the last asylum in Europe to which people can escape for a few weeks for a glimpse of luxury and sanity ? *Visitez Monte Cristo* !" thundered M Reynaud "Ses montagnes ! Sa mer ! Son Casino !"

M Reynaud paused and drank a glass of champagne, and then wiped his beard and moustache complex elaborately with a napkin

"Well, monsieur ?" he demanded

"Well," said Gary slowly, watching the waiter remove his half-empty glass of champagne and replace it by a full glass of Chambertin 1911, "let's get this straight If I contract an alliance with this lady do I become 'My Hereditary Highness Prince Gary of Monte Cristo' ?"

"Ah no, monsieur !"

"Then it isn't enough "

M Reynaud rose with sudden violence from the table

"This steak is *good* !" said Gary

"It is not *enough*, monsieur ?"

"You heard me, baby Not nearly enough "

"But—but—but—but, *monsieur* ! It is *princely* ! To marry a beautiful *girl* to whom you are already *attracted* and who is attracted by *you* !"

"Make it five hundred pounds down, five thousand pounds on the day of the completion of the alliance between the high contracting parties, five thousand a year for life, free bathing facilities and the rest of it, plus a five per cent interest in the *Hôtel du Palais* and a two and a half per cent interest in the *Société des Bains de Mer*, and I'll marry the Czar of Russia "

M Reynaud was a little pale "Those are your terms, monsieur ?"

"For taking an interest in power politics and comic opera, not to mention doing the duty on the woman I love, those are my terms Take it or leave it "

"You will excuse us, monsieur ?"

"Go right ahead I'm one of those magnanimous guys Talk it over all you want "

"Thank you, monsieur "

The three gentlemen retired to a little distance and put their heads together

Mrs Williams' little boy Gary continued to make short work of an exquisite *Chateaubriand marchand de vin*

Presently M Reynaud returned like a herald from the enemy camp

"Two and a half per cent of the takings of the *Hôtel du Palais*, monsieur, one and a half per cent of the profits of the *Société des Bains de Mer*, and one half of one per cent of the profits of the Casino "

"Yippee !" shouted Gary in unexpected falsetto

"Have you brought along the dotted line ?"

"No, monsieur We wish to commit nothing to writing "

"Gentlemen's agreement between cads, eh ?"

"Exactly, monsieur "

Gary finished swallowing a potato

"Suits me " Gary said

CHAPTER SIX

IF THE SUN SHINES ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD, HE saves a little of it for the Champs Élysees

It was one of those sparkling days when all the glitter and the glamour of Paris vociferates a welcome to the sun. The sun is at heart a Frenchman, so he shone down gallantly on the massed display of elegance. He glinted on the bonnets of priceless cars. He sparkled in the spokes of taxi wheels. He beamed broadly on café tables and winked in the sheen of silk stockings as they minced by in high-heeled shoes.

He was a bit of a dog, that sun. He hid in the leaves of the chestnut trees and sent playful beams into unexpected places. He worried the bare back of the young lady who demonstrated the rowing machine *en maillot-de-bain* in the sports shop, and tickled the bald head of the waiter at Fouquet's. He danced at random on red finger-nails here and a monocle there, on plate-glass windows and chromium plate. He brightened the eyes of pretty ladies. He lit up the white wand of the gendarme who conducted the traffic as if all Paris were a musical comedy, as indeed on that morning it was. He set the dust dancing in rusty offices and toyed with the ice in champagne buckets. He put a spring into the step of elderly *boulevardiers* and a touch of unaccustomed warmth in the pomaded heads of sauntering gigolos.

He enjoyed all this enormously, the old Parisian sun. He exacted his tribute in the rising reek of tar and petrol and patchouli. He had a critical eye, that sun. He lit up the threadbare and the faded and the cheap as well as the opulent and elegant and the displayed. Was there a note of meretriciousness in the

scene to his *boulevardier's* eye? Perhaps But when a grey Delage sidled through the six lines of traffic and came silently to rest before the offices of the *Syndicat d'Initiative de Monte Cristo* he said "Ah!" and shone upon it in all his glory

Sitting in the car, M Reynaud gave Gary Williams his last instructions

"Somewhere in all this," said M Reynaud, waving his gloves expansively at the scene, "is Her Hereditary Highness It will be like looking for a needle in a bundle of haystacks We do not know where she is Always she escapes us We follow her, and *pouff*, she is gone again"

"She's a good girl," Gary said

"She has a head, that one," agreed M Reynaud

"She's a swell girl," Gary said "She has pleasant personal habits"

"*Et comme elle est ravissante!*" urged the tactful M Reynaud

"I won't hear a word against her!" declared Gary "If I hear one crack out of you—I admire that girl intensely!"

"I envy you," said M Reynaud "And you will find her, and report to me here"

"O K," Gary said

"It will not be easy"

"I'll find her," Gary declared "I'll find her if I have to set the police on her to do it Say, that's an idea at that!"

M Reynaud made a grimace of unqualified acceptance "I should prefer it without the police It is true that, as the representative of Monte Cristo in Paris, the French Government accords me the privilege of extra-territoriality for my office, but still Here is a cheque, monsieur It will not spring back at you, it is on the Treasury"

"Oh—er—oh, thanks"

"And this, monsieur, is a photograph of His Heredit-

ary Highness Prince Paul, should you wish to arrange for a little assassination "

Gary stared

M Reynaud shrugged "It is one of the methods which had occurred to us But it is not necessary We do not think that it will be necessary "

"Gee, I'm glad to hear that," said Gary

"He also is in the *ville lumière* A waiter, perhaps ? A chef ? A commissionaire at the Folies Bergères ? With these exiled royalties nothing is too picturesque "

"Maybe he's in Dijon," said Gary

"The princes of yesterday do not flourish in the provinces, monsieur They are here In Paris There is nothing in Dijon Her Hereditary Highness was never in Dijon "

"Never in Dijon ?"

"Except to walk from one platform to the next She disembarked from your train, monsieur She entered another "

"Say, what do you know !"

"Your *wagon-lit* attendant, monsieur She bought him for one hundred francs We repurchased him for two hundred "

Gary wagged his head in appreciation "The more I hear about the Princess Steph," he said, "the more I know I'm one of these marrying guys" His face clouded "Shall I be able to be back in Oxford on October seventh ?"

M Reynaud leaned across him and opened the door of the car "That is for you to say" He smiled "Well, monsieur—here is your bundle of haystacks "

"And to think," said Gary, "that I ought to be attending a logic class this minute !" He stepped out of the car "Flash ! Mrs Williams' little boy Gary goes haywire Say, isn't this the darnedest world ?"

M Reynaud smiled "You will find her," said M Reynaud confidently

"I'm one of those persistent guys," Gary said

"Well—thanks for the bathing beaches and everything "

"It is a privilege, monsieur," M Reynaud assured him And raising his left arm in something like the Fascist salute, he slid away

Gary stood in the sunlight and watched the Delage disappear Then he gazed at the two suit-cases beside him on the pavement, at the sparkling prospect, at the hurrying throng, at the vivacious traffic and at the cheque in his hand

"Can you beat that ?" he demanded of the universe

He did not hear the answer, but the universe replied that undoubtedly it could

"Hey !" said Gary, waving the cheque and the photograph in the air "Taxi !"

One of the ordinary mass-produced streamlined taxis, with some fancy basket-work about the doors, lunged across from the main traffic stream and came to rest before him on its haunches

"Do you know any good hotels around here ?" Gary asked

"How about the Ritz ?" suggested the driver in English

"The Ritz it is," said Gary, slinging the two bags aboard, and following himself "Let's go !"

They went They went in a manner altogether surprising to anyone whose previous impressions of Paris taxis had been gained solely by a journey to Dijon They shot from a standstill as if on springs Outside the windows the parade of Paris suddenly streamed by in a hectic torrent of longitudinal glimpses, flowing plate-glass windows, trees, fountains, a distorted gendarme with a whistle and a wand Then the screech of brakes A narrow shave Off again like a flash More rivers of plate glass More fountains More trees A pretty lady Rushing statuary

Gary banged on the window "Not so fast!" shouted Gary "Not so fast!"

The driver nodded. He accelerated brilliantly. They hurled themselves upon the Place de la Concorde. To the stranger this is always a nerve-racking experience, but to Gary's driver the dozens of conflicting streams which empty themselves in short, sharp rushes into the passionate *mêlée* of the square, for all the world like interlacing shoals of goldfish, seemed apparently to make nothing worse than pretty patterns as he engaged the mass at fifty kilometres an hour.

"Hey!" yelled Gary. "I want to live!"

The driver nodded, and sent the cab forward with a jerk. It crashed Gary back in his seat. They charged full tilt into a little flurry of cars rushing upon them from the left, and, missing them by millimetres, charged uproariously in the direction of an enormous bus whose circular radiator heaved up before their vision like the boiler of a locomotive. Gary covered his eyes with his elbow, only to find a moment later, when he recovered his manliness, that the bus was calmly proceeding on its way behind them, and that they were in immediate danger of collision with about forty-three taxis and cars which, suddenly released by a sympathetic and genial policeman, flung themselves happily like yapping dogs into the fray.

Three seconds later everything was over. They were at rest in a traffic block in the Rue de Rivoli, miraculously unscathed. Gary leaned over and put his head between his knees.

They were held up for some minutes in that traffic block. Still shaken by his experiences, Gary sat back in his seat, kicked down one of the small occasional seats opposite, put his feet on it, and settled down comfortably to scrutinize the photograph of Prince Paul. He beheld a young man of the Latin type, which is

popularly supposed to be attractive to women, with smooth black hair and evening dress obscured by many decorations, standing with one hand resting in a proprietary manner on a broken column. The other hand held a cigarette in a long holder, and a rimless monocle was screwed into his right eye-socket. Across the bottom right-hand corner was scrawled "To little Toto from H H H Prince Paul of Monte Cristo." Gary studied the photograph carefully, almost affectionately, and then put it in his wallet with the cheque.

The cab moved on, more leisurely now. Gary fell to studying its interior with a tolerant eye. Frayed arm-rests, battered ash-trays, pink silk curtains, a document framed behind glass, much stamped by the Préfecture of Police, scribbled over in a great black hand, and bearing a photograph of the driver.

The photograph of the driver interested Gary intensely. It showed a young man of the Latin type, popularly supposed to be attractive to women, with smooth black hair and evening dress obscured by many decorations, standing with one hand resting in a proprietary manner on a broken column. At that moment the taxi stopped and the door was opened by a commissionaire, in sky-blue uniform, who took up his position with an arc of sky-blue stomach, standing smartly to attention.

Gary stared at the two identical photographs. He was trembling. Then he looked up, awed by his discovery. What should A do now? Assassinate the guy? Say "Pardon me, but have I the honour of addressing His Hereditary Highness Prince Paul of Monte Cristo?" He got out.

"I—er——" said Gary.

"Four seventy-five," said His Hereditary Highness Prince Paul.

"Sure!" said Gary. "Sure! Pardon me, your—I mean—er——" He fumbled nervously with the money in his pocket.

"You wish for me to pay money for zis cab, monsieur?" put in the commissionaire

"No, no," said Gary, fumbling more nervously than ever, and producing a five-franc note, which he handed over "Say," he exclaimed, "aren't you——"

"And for a tip, sir?" interrupted His Hereditary Highness

"Tip? Oh sure, a tip I thought perhaps What I mean is——"

"It does not matter, sir," said Prince Paul, unexpectedly engaging a gear and driving away

For one stupefied instant Gary was left standing on the pavement Then he came to life

"Hey! You!" Gary yelled after him "Hey! Taxi!"

The commissionaire leapt to the occasion "You wish another taxi, sir?"

"Hey! You!" yelled Gary "Don't let him go! Taxi!"

A shrill blast on the commissionaire's whistle produced one from the rank

"Follow that cab!" shouted Gary "Whatever you do, don't let it out of your sight! Step on it, will you? Follow that cab!"

"Uh?" said the taxi-driver from the folds of his moustache

"Get going, man!" Gary screamed desperately "For God's sake follow that cab!"

"Uh?" repeated the taxi-driver "*Comprends pas Qu'est-ce-qu'il chant?*"

"*Survez l'autre!*" interpreted the commissionaire

"Bon," agreed the taxi-driver without enthusiasm from the folds of his moustache

There was a leisurely grunt Two cylinders began to wheeze gradually faster No one had yet moved There was a loud whirring from the clutch

"Hurry!" yelled Gary, dancing on his seat

The whirring grew louder A series of loud clacks

proceeded from somewhere underneath the vehicle. There was a stuttering movement. For one tremulous instant the ancient machine hovered on the brink of actual motion, and then, very slowly, painfully, asthmatically, it stumbled forward. When it had travelled forward about fifteen yards with infinite difficulty Gary put his head out of the window.

"O K," said Gary. "O K! Let it go! D'you think you could stagger as far as the Ritz?"

CHAPTER SEVEN

FIVE TIMES DURING THE NEXT WEEK GARY SAW THE streamlined taxi with the wicker-work doors

The first time was that same evening of his first day in Paris, when he was eating dinner in a cafe by the Rond Point des Champs Elysees. He saw it come up from the left and spin round the roundabout as though it were attached by string to the central fountain. Though he rushed out of the place as hard as he could, waving a table-napkin in one hand and a piece of roll in the other, and shouting, he was too late to attract His Hereditary Highness's attention, and was nearly run over for his pains.

The second time was two days later, when he saw it whizzing through the Place Vendôme from the window of his hotel. On that occasion, though he rushed to the telephone with the instinct to ring someone up about it, it was clear that he could do nothing.

On the third occasion he gave chase. He had been wandering about the streets as was becoming his irritable habit, keeping one eye on the traffic for the taxi and the other on the pavement for a certain face, when he found himself down by the river. Suddenly he saw the thing, tearing across one of the bridges, and coming towards him.

By the grace of God there was a cab-rank almost at his elbow.

"*Survez !*" yelled Gary, having learned the word for just such a chance as this. "*Survez ce damned taxi, and drive like hell !*"

This time his chauffeur was a furious and dashing fellow. He did not need to be told twice. He grinned from ear to ear, slammed everything with his feet, and

spinning his rear wheels with frantic enthusiasm, got away to a racing start

The Prince was not more than twenty yards in front. They hounded him down the quayside, and slewed across the front of Nôtre Dame, with tyres screaming and horns in nerve-racking and unceasing cry. They chased him in and out of side-streets and short cuts. They shot, one after the other, into the same old Rue de Rivoli, they hared along its length like madmen, scattering pedestrians to the wind, and spinning infuriated gendarmes on their perches as they whistled by. It was terrific! It was sensational! It was the race of a lifetime! Gary was on his knees in his excitement, pounding in a frenzy on the glass partition with his fists.

They gained. He was certain that they gained. The rest of the traffic gave the amusing impression of travelling stolidly backwards. By the corner of Smith's bookshop an agile gendarme, who saw them coming hell-for-leather in his direction, did the best he could. The lights were red. He waved at them frantically with his wand. He blew shrill blasts on his whistle. He stepped with foolish gallantry into the road and held out both his arms. In the last permissible second he leapt for his life, and the piercing pitch of his whistle dropped five ridiculous semitones as they hurtled over the patch of road where he had so lately stood.

"Oh boy! Oh boy! Oh boy!" sang Gary, smiting the air in an ecstasy of the chase. "Step on it! Go on! After him! You've got him! You've got him!"

They were in the Place de la Concorde. Taxis to right of them, taxis to left of them, eddied, swirled, charged, skidded, blew brazen blasts, swamped and engulfed them. In the heat of the engagement the glimpses of the Prince's taxi were only spasmodic. It appeared now and then through gaps in the indiscriminate ebb and flow of battle. It was ten yards

away It was thirty yards away It was sixty or seventy yards away It was There was only one man in Paris who could drive like that It was clear of the fracas It was right through It was unencumbered, speeding away into the distance It was out of sight

Sadly they came to rest by the little covered tennis court which is one of the most delicate things in a delicate city The driver shrugged and turned in his seat There were tears in his brown eyes, and his lips were pceevish with professional pain He would not meet Gary's glance

"There is no charge, monsieur *Il n'y a pas de frans* "

"Hell," said Gary, "snap out of that! We did our best "

"*Il n'y a pas de frans* "

"Nonsense," said Gary "It's a mighty fine show we put up "

He held out a fifty-franc note

"*Il n'y a pas de frans*," repeated the driver with invincible emphasis "*Au revoir, monsieur*," and he drove away

The fourth time was the next afternoon at the same place Gary stood by the tennis court helplessly, hopelessly, knowing that it was impossible to catch the only man in Paris who could drive through the Place de la Concorde like that, and waiting for the simple dejected pleasure of watching a master at his work

At about four that afternoon the Prince came down the Rue Royale from the Madeleine, and Gary addressed a white-bearded stranger who stood beside him

"Do you want to see something? Well, keep your eye on that cab See that? See that? Gosh, did you see that? Isn't that great? Look at him *Look at him Look at that!* Say, do you know there's only one man in Paris who can get across the Place de la

Concorde in seven seconds flat ? Well, you've certainly seen something this time, mister Gee, that guy's got technique "

"Pardon, monsieur ? Je ne parle pas Anglais "

The fifth time was outside the entrance to the Bois, where Gary saw him actually hailed He was hailed by a distinguished gentleman who kissed his wife and kissed his daughter, and kissed his son, and stooped to fondle the head of the black poodle before he entered the vehicle and was whirled away, all within fifty yards of where Gary stood

A week had passed, and a great melancholy settled down on Gary

As he sat on that fateful Tuesday, at one of the café tables outside the "Berri" in the Champs Élysées, he admitted to himself that a week's unsuccessful sleuthing, and a week's loneliness at that, were getting him down He wanted action Besides, he wanted Stephanie

He ransacked his mind for some dashing plan of campaign Call on the police and give him in charge for beating the lights, and with a description of the cab ? Nuh-uh Catch the Prince out with a chorus girl and publish a photograph in the papers ? For all he knew, the Prince never went out with a chorus girl Kidnap the guy ? Nuh-uh Only get him in wrong with the police Where was he ? What he had to do was to stop the cab Shoot at his tyres ? Nuh-uh Too obvious Too prearranged What he wanted was something big, something that worked, but at the same time, something accidental

Then three things happened

The first thing was that the Prince's taxi passed on the far side of the road, going down to the Place de la Concorde, and, a few minutes later, came right past where he was sitting on its way up towards the Arc

The second thing was the sudden and spectacular arrival of M Reynaud upon the scene M Reynaud, at the seat of his Delage, came out of the Rue de Berri at a full forty kilometres an hour, and looking apparently neither to the right nor to the left, flashed across the six lines of Champs Élysées traffic and pulled up with a jerk at the door of his offices across the way

Nothing happened to M Reynaud, but the effects of his passage were truly stimulating and remarkable A taxi going north spun round three times in its own length, and came to rest against the kerb with a badly buckled wheel A large private car, also travelling north, slewed violently in an effort to avoid the teetotum, and drove a third car, which was running parallel with it, to make abrupt and resounding contact with the rear panel of a taxi which was travelling south, it is true, but had been presenting its rear portion to that point of the compass in a violent attempt not to travel at all

For a moment there was almost silence on the Avenue Then life resumed its sway M Reynaud, who had paused in his doorway to observe these performances with amusement and contempt, threw away the butt of his cigar and went in The taxi with the buckled wheel lolloped away in absurd ungainliness after disgorging a fashionable lady, who sat down at one of the café tables and petulantly ordered beer The taxi and the private car in the middle of the roadway remained where they were for a few moments, while their owners flung their arms to heaven and exchanged addresses Then they, too, disentangled themselves and, miraculously, considering the noise of their impact, proceeded on their way

The third thing was that the Prince's taxi passed on the other side of the road going down to the Place de la Concorde

It was this combination of events which gave sudden birth to the great idea Something big! Something

that worked! Something accidental! The Place de la Concorde, where every taxi in Paris passed at least twenty times a day By Golly, *an accident!* A good big one this time Argument! Vilifications! Visions of men with stretchers! Reports in the newspaper! His Hereditary Highness Prince Paul of Monte Cristo—Assassination? Well, maybe hardly that The elimination of Prince Paul from the marriage stakes? Well, maybe hardly that, either, but the end of his taxi The end of this darned inactivity An interchange of addresses And the arrival of an anxious Stephanie to enquire He was going deliberately to smash up the Prince's cab

He rose from the table as casually as possible, trying to hide the wicked and thoughtful gleam in his eye He paid for his strawberry ice cream It was seven francs He waited until well surrounded with nervous pedestrians at the pavement's edge, and hurried across with them in short dashes—one island—two islands—three islands—the other side He eyed the Delage with a speculative eye Then he entered the Monte Cristo offices and asked for M Reynaud

M Reynaud was effusive M Reynaud was politely facetious

"Ah! My dear Monsieur Williams! You are still single? Tut tut! On this so lovely day? You have found the Princess? You have made advances to her?"

"Not yet," said Gary, "but I've found the Prince"

"*Tiens!*" exclaimed M Reynaud "That is a beginning You have found him! Where?"

"Driving a taxi"

"Oho! So he is a chauffeur, His Hereditary Highness!" He paused and grew solemn "But to be a chauffeur one must practise absolute sobriety For His Hereditary Highness, that is not so good" M Reynaud seemed quite worried at the thought He pursed his lips and shook his head "That is not a wise

choice of career, that," said M Reynaud "You have known this long?"

"I just saw him driving down to the Place de la Concorde That's why I want to borrow your car"

"You wish to borrow my car?"

"Just for a couple of hours while I follow him to his lair"

M Reynaud nodded, unconvinced "Just for a couple of hours You think it is a suitable car? You can drive?"

"Oh sure, I can drive"

"You can drive a Delage?"

"What's biting you? Say! You're well covered by insurance, aren't you?"

"Oh yes," said M Reynaud "I am well covered by insurance It is not that It is only just that" He hesitated and made a *moue* "Very well," said M Reynaud "You may have the car."

"I may? *Thanks, partner,*" said Gary, gupping M Reynaud by the hand, running out of the room and clattering down the stairs all in the same motion

He burst out through the swing-doors, started across the wide pavement, vaulted over the door into the car and started her up He caught a momentary glimpse of M Reynaud's face watching him anxiously through the window He waved to him over his shoulder and flung himself with determination into a gap in the chattering traffic

Now, driving in Paris is diverting enough if the novice remembers that his life depends on giving way to everything approaching from the right Once master this official rule, and the devotee discovers that it is just that apparent succession of suicides and assassins who rush happily out, at right angles, from narrow streets, alleyways and hidden doorways, without a thought of tomorrow, which gives such infinite charm and variety to the shortest journey The rule of the

right is one of those airy little Gallic rules designed, with neat logicity, to kill monotony, time, and the incompetent driver in one breath-taking gesture And Gary was unaware of it

At the broad entrance to the Avenue George V he was prepared for the avalanche of vehicles which bore down upon him with all the impetuous enthusiasm of a cavalry charge No doubt the same God who watches over drunkards and seamen watches also over Americans By sheer force of character and a rugged resolution not to be terrorized by a horde of excitable French, Gary broke the rule flagrantly a dozen times in as many metres, and, with the squeal of brakes and a chorus of imprecations echoing in his ears, and vehicles tumbling all about him, sailed in a purposeful manner to the other side The man in the Citroen was also within his rights A score of yards further on, this little pot-bellied person rushed backwards out of a private garage, braked to a stop immediately in front of Gary and sped away With superhuman footwork Gary stopped the Delage in time, but only just Immediately there followed a waiter on a bicycle with a long loaf under either arm He whirled out of some hidden alley, saw Gary, wheeled too violently, and deposited himself, the bicycle and the two loaves, in the roadway Gary described a vivid half-circle, and, sweating with excitement, rescued him from the jaws of death

The Rond Point of the Champs Élysées, since it is a roundabout, proved comparatively easy It was negotiated with scarcely more than two dents in the offside wing, and a resounding clang which probably proceeded from the rear bumper Gritting his teeth, Gary disregarded the unfortunate sound and passed cautiously down that broad and uninterrupted space where the children play and the members of the cabinet saunter, and the deserted restaurants stand, and which lingers on as so agreeable a reminder of

Edwardian Paris Before him opened the magnificent death-trap of the Place de la Concorde

On the very edge of it Gary stopped, pulled his hat well down over his eyes in the approved manner, kept the engine running, and waited with a sharp eye on the whirling kaleidoscope of cars Old taxis, new taxis, ancient limousines, the last word in impudent roadsters, lumbering buses, pieposterious cycle-cars, vast charabancs, more taxis, more taxis, and still more taxis, they swirled and eddied, they scuffled and dived and swerved with bewildering efficiency

Suddenly he saw it! Away there to the right, coming swiftly across the Pont de la Concorde from the opposite side of the river, was the familiar streamlined taxi

He engaged second gear

Even at that distance it was unmistakable, as it flashed in and out like a living thing, weaving its way brilliantly past every other vehicle on the bridge Gary sat on, clenching the wheel, and racing his engine in readiness In another moment the taxi would be past the end of the bridge, would be rushing into the great open square

There it was! One more second one more second Gary felt the blood pumping in his heart *Now!* Bang, went the clutch Whirr, went the wheels The great car zoomed forward in a lithe and lovely bound It was the most exhilarating sensation The Prince's taxi came on They were within fifty yards Now they were closer Thirty yards! Somewhere in that mad expanse other cars skidded and twisted out of his way, and screamed a protest with their horns Gary saw none of them The Prince's taxi was just ahead Now for it *Now for it!* He put his foot hard down For one thunderous, amazing instant the big bonnet of the Delage took sudden wings It seemed to soar There was one flash of catastrophic imminence, of a cab window queerly tilted, of the Prince's face in a

mask of strain and apprehension, and then—
CRASH!!

The world stood still The noise of the collision seemed to dwindle slowly into the silence, with little cadences and regretful lingerings of broken glass Then nothing

His Hereditary Highness Prince Paul of Monte Cristo descended from the battered wreck of his cab He seemed strangely cool He surveyed the ruins The cab sat in the road like a recalcitrant mule with both its back wheels splayed out so that the thing squatted on its rear axle Then he looked at the Delage, with its crumpled bonnet embedded in the taxi amidships, while a steady stream of scalding water descended firmly on the road and made trickles in the dust

He approached Gary, who remained grinning happily in his seat, clicked heels, and bowed, with an expressionless face

"His Hereditary Highness Prince Paul of Monte Cristo," he announced "At your service "

"Glad to know you," answered Gary "I'm Gary Williams "

The Prince bowed again

"I am at your service," he repeated, "at any place and time you wish to appoint "

Gary frowned

"At my *service* ?"

"If you would be so good as to inform me of your address, my seconds will call upon you in half an hour to make arrangements "

"What do you mean, seconds ?" Gary sat up suddenly "Say! Are you challenging me to a *duel* ?"

"Certainly!" replied the Prince "I am correct in thinking, am I not, that you caused this *contretemps* deliberately ?"

"Oh now! Your Hereditary Highness! Don't get me wrong!"

The Prince pointed with a trembling finger to the Pont de la Concorde

"I was coming from the right," said the Prince

"Sure you were coming from the right! We don't want to have a war to the knife over that"

"I must demand, monsieur, that honour be satisfied!"

"Now, now, Prince, take it easy! Just relax"

"Relax! Relax! I have the honour to inform monsieur that he talks like an American cinema"

"Well, you're making a noise like a French film yourself"

"Am I to understand that you are a *coward*, monsieur?"

"Now, let's talk *reasonably* about this! You don't want to turn a *contretemps* into an international incident. How do you say we just exchange addresses?"

Prince Paul's answer was to depress his lips into a disdainful line, and, in a thoroughly surprising and unexpected manner, put all his force into a punch to Gary's jaw

The onlookers cheered

"My *God!*" muttered Gary, slowly and menacingly, first fingering his chin and then beginning grimly to rise from his seat. "No guy ever got away with doing a thing to me like that——"

"My card, monsieur," said the Prince, insolently flourishing the thing under his nose

Gary stared at it. Then he took it. Then he stared for a long time, speculatively, venomously, at the Prince

"O K!" said Gary shortly, at last. "You'll find me at the Ritz"

PART THREE

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE ARRIVAL OF THE PRINCE'S SECONDS WAS PUNCTUALITY and punctiliousness itself

The telephone by his bedside tinkled, and the voice of the reception clerk spoke with unaccustomed servility

"His Royal Highness Prince George of Hohenlippe and His Excellency the Grand Duke Nicholas to see you, sir "

"Hell !" said Gary "Have them come up "

They arrived, one a young man in mechanic's overalls with the name of a well-known motor-car printed in a semicircle across his chest, and the other an elderly gentleman with features so fine that their distinction was scarcely marred by the fact that he was dressed in the uniform of a commissionaire and carried an unrolled umbrella Both gentlemen looked grave together, and bowed in unison

"Monsieur Gary Williams ?" It was the elder who spoke

"Now listen, gentlemen," said Gary "I don't want——"

"You have your seconds, monsieur ?" the older spokesman interrupted in sombre tones

"No," said Gary "I don't know a soul Besides——"

"It is a formality, monsieur, but a necessary one "

Gary gave the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of a shrug

"His Hereditary Highness suggests as a convenient meeting-place the rear of the Debussy Memorial at midnight "

"Debussy Memorial ?"

"A taxi will take you there in ten minutes, or there

is a Metro station at the Avenue Henri Martin, or the number thirty-seven omnibus "

"Thanks," said Gary "I'm a stranger in these parts myself "

"The choice of weapons lies with you, monsieur "

"Well, what have you got ?"

"Swords, monsieur, or pistols "

"Sharp swords ?"

"Oh yes, monsieur "

"Pistols," said Gary

"*Entendu, monsieur* "

Gary eased his neck in his collar

"Say, do I have to go through with this ? I mean, *darn* it, all I wanted was an introduction to the Prince——"

"You will obtain that, monsieur, never fear ! And —ci—if you will forgive me—a white tie, monsieur, and tails "

"*Tails* ? Won't it do if I wear my tuxedo ?"

The two seconds consulted each other with their eyes The younger nodded

"Gee," said Gary with a sigh of relief "That's a load off my mind "

At which both gentlemen backed a step, bowed, turned and departed

Gary picked up the telephone

"Room, service, monsieur ?"

"Listen," said Gary "I have to fight a duel D'you happen to have a couple of good reliable seconds in the hotel ?"

"Hold on a minute, monsieur, if you please "

Gary held on

"Allo ? Allo ?"

"Yes ?"

"This affair of honour, monsieur, is at what time ?"

"Around midnight "

"I can arrange it, monsieur There are two of the

day staff, who, for a consideration—say a hundred francs each——”

“Surely !” Gary agreed

“You wish me to charge this to the account, monsieur ?”

“Well, yes, certainly ”

“It is just that I point out, monsieur, that this becomes susceptible to the *taxe de luxe*, the *taxe de séjour*, the ten per cent for *service* ”

“I get you,” said Gary “Thanks I’ll pay cash Thanks for mentioning it ”

“It is nothing, monsieur At a quarter to twelve ?”

“Fine ”

“I will hire you a private car, monsieur It is more convenient—just in case—should monsieur wish to be wounded, or—or—anything——”

“Swell !” said Gary, hanging up

The reception clerk was as good as his word At a quarter to twelve Gary said good-bye to his reflection in the glass, gave a final twitch to the tuxedo, and went down into the hall Two waiters, correctly disguised in overcoats, were waiting for him by the swing-door

“Monsieur Williams ?”

“Come on, let’s go ”

“*Très bien, monsieur* ”

Outside, a Rolls-Royce lay The commissionaire opened its door for him while the two seconds politely squeezed themselves on to the open-air seat beside the driver The commissionaire closed the door and saluted, and hurriedly left for another car which decanted two elderly ladies in opera cloaks returning from a symphony concert From his solitary position of state Gary waved the signal to proceed, and they wallowed away at a dignified and funereal pace

The Debussy Memorial is that charming rectangle of stone on the edge of the Bois which has become the

haunt of every nursemaid and every perambulator in Paris. It is a pleasant thing, inscribed with the first bars of Debussy's *Après-midi d'un Faune*, and the rectangular arrangement of the stone seats and flower-beds which surround it is as great a magnet to children as the Peter Pan statue in Kensington Gardens. Now, by moonlight, it stood up in the darkness eerily white, casting a sharp-edged shadow across the sleeping flowers as if it were set there to be a moon-dial. In the lee of it two lights twinkled. They belonged to the Prince's taxi.

Two dark figures, with ghostly shirt-fronts, detached themselves, advanced across a piece of grass, and removed their silk hats with becoming gravity.

The two waiters scrambled down, and, with equal gravity and remarkable aplomb, removed theirs in reply.

From his seat in the back of the car Gary watched a whispered conversation. At last the four seconds removed themselves to a little distance and began pacing out distances with their patent-leathered feet.

Then Gary saw a fresh figure join the quartet and shake hands solemnly all round. When he turned for an instant to look up at the moon, Gary noticed, with misgiving, that he carried a small black bag. The doctor!

A further conversation ensued during which the five figures could be seen animatedly drawing one another's attention to the surrounding objects. Here the top of a tree. There in the distance a great block of flats. Here the light of the moon coming at this angle. Finally, it seemed that they were agreed and the party split up into three. The doctor walked a short distance, opened his bag, took an artist's three-legged sketching-stool from it, fitted it together with some care, and sat down upon it. The Prince's two seconds advanced upon the Prince's cab. The second-floor waiter and the assistant cocktail-bar attendant promenaded with

portentous dignity towards the Rolls and opened the door

"All set, Monsieur Williams "

"Have you decided where to put the grave?"

"*Pas encore, monsieur! Mais* " "A look of hunger

"Speaking of graves," nodded Gary "I know Here, boys, better grab it while there's life "

He handed out a one-hundred-franc note to each

"*Merci, monsieur! Merci, monsieur!*"

Gary clambered out of the Rolls while one held the door for him and the other politely put a hand under his armpit, and walked to meet the enemy

The enemy was distinctly impressive All three were habited in what is known as *teune de soirée impeccable*, and as they came to meet him he caught glimpses of broad silk bands and the other panoply of ex-Royalty glinting superbly upon their persons The Prince himself was wearing a magnificent black cloak with a red-silk lining, fastened at the neck by a chain The monocle was in his eye His cigarette-holder dangled between his fingers His silk hat gleamed, and he came with a curious stiffness as if something was the matter with one of his legs

"Good evening, Monsieur Williams," said the Prince

"Good evening, Your Hereditary Highness," replied Gary.

"We have an excellent night for it "

"The rain seems to be holding off "

The Prince inclined his head gravely in agreement, and turned to the elder of his two friends, the one with the white beard and imperial, and said

"Very well, then, Nicky "

Then he removed his silk hat and handed it to one of his seconds Gary did the same Both hats were handed to the doctor, who placed them, in tiara-fashion, atop his own, like the umpire at a cricket match

The ex-Grand Duke Nicholas produced a mahogany case, which he opened to disclose two unpleasant-looking weapons. He handed the box to Gary with a bow.

"The choice of weapons is yours, monsieur."

"Do they both have hard centres?"

"They are loaded, monsieur."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Gary, selecting one.

The Prince took the other.

"Now, gentlemen, you will stand back to back, and you will wait for the word 'tree'. On the word 'tree' you will start walking. On the word 'tree' you will walk twenty paces, turn, and fire one shot. It is understood?"

"Very lucidly put, my dear Nicky," said the Prince.

"Monsieur?"

"Clear enough to the meanest intelligence," said Gary.

"I am glad, monsieur. Now then, you will stand, please?"

The Prince and Gary stood back to back. The doctor steadied his hats.

"You are ready, messieurs?"

"One!" said the ex-Grand Duke Nicholas. "Two!" said the ex-Grand Duke Nicholas. "Tree!"

Gary set forth on his journey, while the ex-Grand Duke Nicholas counted: "One! Two! Tree! Four! Five!" The twenty paces seemed interminable. "Eight! Nine! Ten! Elf! Twelf!" ("Quite a walk!" thought Gary). "Fifteen! Sixteen! Seventeen! Eighteen! Nineteen!"

Two shots rang out in quick succession.

There followed one of those pregnant moments while the echoes rushed about Paris and then died somewhere near Passy. The two seconds came running.

"You are all right, monsieur?"

"Sure! I'm O K! How about the Prince?"

"The Prince is not touched, monsieur "

"Not even winged ?"

"No, monsieur ! But alas, monsieur — the doctor——"

"The *doctor* ?"

"He is wounded, monsieur In the hat, monsieur !
In two places, monsieur "

"In *two* places ?"

"*Oui, monsieur C'est une chose tout à fait remarquable !*"

"Yeah " Gary broke into a slow smile "That certainly is the darnedest thing "

He chuckled, and then, observing the Prince's approach, quickly composed his face into the pained expression suitable to an affair of honour

The Prince came up to him, still with that peculiar stiffness, but with a certain subtle alteration in his gait Before, he had marched Now he strolled Nevertheless, he bowed with a touch of formality

"I congratulate you, monsieur You are an excellent shot "

"Thank you, Your Hereditary Highness," murmured Gary "And likewise "

The Prince looked sideways for a moment

"I must thank you, monsieur, for your unerring discretion It is strange that we should both have had the same idea "

"Oh, I don't know," Gary said "One had only to take a look at that guy sitting there, and it seemed kind of obvious, in a way "

The Prince nodded slowly, many times

Their hats were returned to them, each neatly punctured with a hole

"At last," announced the Prince, in a tone of surprise, "I have found an American for whom I entertain distinct sensations of friendship "

Gary stared

"Come to think of it," he declared, "I've discovered

a Prince I wouldn't be ashamed to kick in the pants, because he seems like a good guy at bottom "

"This must be celebrated," said His Hereditary Highness solemnly "It is an occasion "

"You're absolutely right," said Gary

"May I have the honour of escorting you to my carriage ?"

"It would be a privilege," said Gary, "to accept "

"Good-bye, gentlemen," said the Prince "And thank you for your services Shall we take arms, monsieur ?"

They sauntered arm in arm to the Prince's taxi The Prince politely opened the driver's door and motioned Gary to slide across into the further seat Then he himself mounted into position, gave a shade more tilt to his silk hat, tapped his cigarette over the side, drew on a pair of gloves, and put the machinery in motion They swept down upon the bright lights

"I trust," said Gary, "that Your Highness's back axle has recovered ?"

"I thank you," replied the Prince "It is improved Since the insurance company was so kind, I took the opportunity to arrange for a higher ratio This afternoon I touched a hundred in the Avenue Foch And the Delage ?"

"A total wreck "

"Tut tut," said the Prince

"Tut tut is right," said Gary

The taxi stopped

"This," said the Prince, "is the Bal Tabarin They are naked but beautiful, the girls Have you any objection ?"

"Theoretically, no," said Gary

"Let us begin "

The commissioner stared, stiffened, removed his hat with a flourish, and bowed low

"Good evening, Altesse "

"Good evening, Jacques "

"If only we had known you were *coming*, *Altesse*
If only you had given us a little *warning* A thousand
pardons, *Altesse* There is no carpet ! No awning "

"It is nothing," murmured the Prince forgivingly
"It is only for a little while Come, *mon vieux* "

The Prince led the way and Gary followed, while
the commissionaire motionlessly presented his parting
As they emerged into bright lights the manager saw
them, stiffened, gave rapid instructions, came hurrying
forward, and made a deep obeisance

"Your Highness We are *deeply* honoured "

"You have a table ?"

"Naturally, Highness This way, if Your Highness
would condescend "

"You have some beautiful girls here this evening ?"

"Quite ravishing, Your Highness "

"They are naked ?"

"Undoubtedly, Highness "

"Good We will have some champagne and some
randy "

"I am deeply sensible, Your Highness "

Gary whispered "Don't they call you Your Hered-
itary Highness ?"

"It is not necessary," said the Prince "We will
follow this man "

They followed him as he preceded them backwards,
down a passage, through a curtain, into a place shaped
like a theatre, with tables arranged where the stalls
should be On the stage sixteen indubitably naked
girls, arranged like the cylinders of a radial aeroplane
engine, with a large propeller in front, were revolving
on a gadget

As Gary and Prince Paul came through the curtains
the manager made imperative gestures The band
struck up the National Anthem of Monte Cristo (which
happened, for some reason, to be set to the same
melody as the "Red Flag"), the diners rose, and the

gadget which was revolving the young ladies came to a respectful stop

The Prince surveyed everything and everybody through his monocle Gary stood stiffly to attention So did the manager So did the guests So did the sixteen cylinders, some of whom, arrested at the bottom of their movement, were growing uncomfortably red in the face

The last notes died away The diners scuffled with their chairs The orchestra returned to its imitation of an aeroplane in flight The maidens revolved again The Prince relaxed

"It is very cosy," approved the Prince "We will have some champagne and some brandy "

He made his way across the floor, attended by five waiters When his chair was in the correct position and he hovered over it with the tails of his coat pulled up, he indicated with a gracious gesture of his hand that Gary might sit down, and did the same A bottle in a large bucket of ice was brought and set beside them A glass of champagne was poured for each, and an egg-cupful of brandy added

"We will drink," said the Prince, "to each other To you, Monsieur Williams "

"To you, Your Highness," responded Gary

"*Attendez !* This 'Your Highness' is not necessary between friends It will be enough if you call me 'sir' "

"To you, sir, then "

"It is more cosy so Well, up she goes "

"Down she goes "

They drank

The waiter filled their glasses

"We will now drink," said Prince Paul, "to France, which shelters everybody, and where everybody, whether prince or porter, Englishman, American or what the hell, feels at home To France "

"I'm with you there," said Gary "To France "

They drank

The waiter filled their glasses

"We will now drink," said the Prince, "to Oxford, which makes gentlemen of us all You were at Oxford, I think ?"

"Say ! How in the world did you know that ?"

"That, what ?"

"That, *sir* !"

"That's better, my dear old boy," said the Prince generously "I have my spies What college ?"

"St John's "

"So was I," said the Prince, raising his glass "The dear old Alma Mater "

"The darned old Alma Mater "

They drank

The waiter filled their glasses

"We will now drink——"

"Hey !" said Gary "It's my turn !"

The Prince made another generous gesture

"We drink," said Gary, "to Mother Nature "

"Mother Nature ? Whatever for ?"

"Why not ?" demanded Gary, pugnaciously

"You're absolutely right," agreed the Prince, more than generously "To Mother Nature "

They drank

The waiter began the motion of filling up their glasses, but a few drops were all that came

The Prince rose

"We will have some champagne," the Prince said, "and some brandy "

"Another bottle, *Altesse* ?"

"What, here ?" said the Prince, shocked "This is a celebration !" He bowed and crooked an arm to Gary "Come We will have some champagne and some brandy "

"Fine," said Gary, taking his arm "Where do we go from here ?"

"Does it matter ?" the Prince demanded in utter astonishment,

"I begin to get the idea," said Gary, slowly "This is acceleration!"

They wavered, arm in arm, through the tables, past bowing waiters massed on either side of the entrance like a phalanx, past the scraping manager who produced a folded piece of paper on a plate which the Prince indicted "Paul of Monte Cristo" with a wave of a pencil, past the commissionaire standing tremulously, hat in one hand, door of the taxi in the other. They climbed aboard the taxi and zigzagged about three hundred yards to a small decorated doorway which bore the superscription "*Chez les Nudistes*"

"We will have some champagne," said the Prince, "and some brandy."

This time there was no commissionaire, but the deeply respectful manager of the place himself sprayed them with "*Altesses*", arranged for the Monte Cristo National Anthem, and gave them a table at the feet of a young woman who answered the description in every particular, and was slowly going through some sort of motions with a hoop. They brought a bucket of champagne and a golden bottle.

"We will drink," said the Prince, with a sudden impulse, "to the United States of America."

"Fine!" said Gary, with rugged patriotism.

"Just a minute, jus' a minute," said the Prince. "We should stand for this, I think. Please rise."

"You're dead right there, Prince," Gary told him grimly. "Shall we smash glasses?"

"Certainly, certainly," agreed the Prince. "*The United States of America!*"

"*The United States of America!*"

They drank and hurled their glasses on the floor, where they shivered to a thousand fragments. One or two of the other merry-makers rose and craned their necks.

"We will have some champagne and some brandy."

"This time," said Gary, "we'll make it Monte Crishto."

"Thas a *very-good-idea*," said the Prince

"After all," Gary argued, "we must be fair "

"Cernly," agreed the Prince "We must be fair
Scrupulously fair "

"That's exactly what I said Shall we put one foot
on the table ?"

"No, no," said the Prince "*Two* feet !"

"Let's get this straight," urged Gary "I have *no*
wish to insult your country, but don't you think that
might be rather uncomfortable ?"

"Very well," admitted the Prince graciously "One
foot It is more cosy so "

"I believe you're right, Prince "

Gary stood up and put one foot on the table

The Prince did the same

"Monte Cristo !"

"Monte Cristo !"

They drank, and dashed their goblets to the ground

"We will have some champagne," said Gary, "and
some brandy "

"By all means" The Prince looked round and
addressed the manager loudly "Waiter! Some fresh
glasses "

"It is a privilege, *Altesse* "

"And take away that girl She displeases me "

"But, *Altesse* !"

"Bad teeth," said Gary

"Terrible," agreed the Prince "Have you no
jugglers here ?"

"Oh yes, your Highness "

"You will bring me some jugglers, please I wish
for some *excellen'* juggling We will now drink—
whash'll we drink to ?"

"S'your turn, sir *altesse* "

"No, no, 's'*yours* "

"Pardon *me* "

"Very well, my friend, if you insist *To the Revo-*
lution !"

Gary thought hard about this

"What revolution?"

"*The revolution*"

"Oh," said Gary, as if a light dawned, "you mean *that* revolution"

"Cernly Had you any other revolution in mind?"

"No, no, Prince, it's the *same* revolution Bet you a dollar you can't hit the ball on top of that billiard cue"

"I'll take you *The Revolution*!"

"*Up the rebels*!"

"*Down with all dirty democrats*!"

They drank

"One—two—three!"

Two empty champagne glasses hurtled across the stage to the top of a pyramidal construction which a Japanese gentleman in a loin-cloth was balancing on his nose Both missed

"Hurrah!" said the Prince, picking up a roll

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen! *Altesse*!"

"Oh, *there* you are!" exclaimed the Prince "I've been looking for you Fresh glasses"

"*Altesse*! I entreat you, *Altesse*!"

"What this place wants," announced Gary, "'s music!"

"I absoluly and entirely agree with you, my dear fellow," said Prince Paul generously "Le's go somewhere else"

He picked up the bottle and put it under his left arm, and began to beat, with his right, a few preliminary bars Then they struck up, simultaneously but in different keys, the Monte Cristo National Anthem

The manager, torn between fears for the respectability of his establishment and the respect due to a visiting monarch, stood smartly to attention, and made signs at the trouser-seam with his hands for the audience to rise One by one they did so

With their heads together like a glee party, Gary and the Prince sang solemnly through the verse part in terrifying disharmony, and then upon a common

impulse began marking time with their feet, wheeled to the right, and marched after each other with concentrated solemnity into the cold night air

"Are you tight yet?" enquired the Prince solicitously

Gary examined his sensations for a moment

"No," he said "But I could give a swell imitation "

"*Allons!*" exclaimed the Prince "We will have some champagne and some brandy "

"Fine!" agreed Gary heartily "Fine and dandy! Where do we go from here?"

"*L'Apache,*" said the Prince

"Shall we get played in with the National Anthem?"

"We shall *insist* upon it "

"Let's pull that gag all night It's a great gag "

"You're telling me," said the Prince

This made Gary laugh immoderately He slapped his knee and pointed to the Prince with delighted appreciation "I bet you get an awful kick out of being a prince "

"I do not have much time for it *Montez, montez, mon vieux* I think I am becoming sober "

"That's losing your grip, old war-horse," Gary said, getting in "You've got the bottle "

"That is true We will have some champagne "

He held it to his lips, gulped some of it down, and passed it politely to Gary while he clambered aboard and took hold of the controls Gary finished it and said "Do I throw it away?"

"No, no," said Prince Paul "There is a policeman at the corner "

"You mean throw it at him?"

"Might I suggest a formal presentation?"

"Prince," announced Gary in tones of admiration, "I like you! You're a grand guy! Psst! Oi!"

The Prince slowed to a crawl, and Gary beckoned imperiously to the gendarme

"Monsieur?" said the gendarme, approaching

Gary produced the bottle as pompously as he could "Speaking on behalf of the distinguished citizens of Monte Cristo, and acting on the instructions of His Hereditary Highness Prince Paul, it is my privilege and my duty," said Gary, "to hand you the lemon." He added, out of the corner of his mouth "How about the National Anthem?"

"*Sifflez, sifflez, les cornets*" began the Prince, and Gary joined in, with patriotic fervour. But the policeman was not one of those people who stood stiffly to attention. He raised the champagne bottle in a minatory manner above his head. Still singing with respectful countenances the two monarchists jerked in their seats as the new back-axle ratio whisked them away only in the nick of time.

"*Ici l'Apache,*" announced Prince Paul, mounting the pavement and braking with spectacular abruptness.

This time there was a commissionaire. He jumped back on to both feet and saluted in a military manner "You leave this one to me." Gary nodded at the Prince, put one finger to his nose, and entered alone "Oh—er—good evening."

"Good evening, sair! A table for one?"

"Well, no. Asamarrerofac," whispered Gary confidentially, "his—er—His Hererary Highness Prince Paul of Monte Cristo wishes to pay a little visit. Jus' a little visit. His Highness would like a bottle of champagne, some brandy, and—er—your fellows might see to it that the National Anthem is played as he enters. His Highness is rather insistent upon all that sort of thing."

"Of course, of course, Excellency!" the manager assured him, rubbing his hands.

"Make a job of it," said Gary, "there'sh a good fellow," and he moved, with a most unexpected but momentary loss of balance, in what was intended to be a stately progress towards the door. Already the

sounds of tinkly French dance music had given place in the nether regions of the building to a swelling, compelling chord

"All is in readiness, Highness," he murmured confidentially, and was astounded to notice that the Prince also made a small gyroscopic motion with his body as he set foot to ground. It was only momentary, too. Together they passed with fair dignity through the entrance hall, and came out at the head of a flight of rickety wooden steps which descended to the artificial caverns below. The clients were already standing looking up, and at once the band blared into the opening phrases of the Monte Cristo signature tune. Somewhat unsteadily the Prince and Gary, each with a hand Napoleonically placed in his coat front, stood making faces as nearly as possible like the faces of dictators.

"Let 'em have it," said Gary, out of the corner of his mouth.

The Prince took a deep breath, Gary took another. Suddenly their voices boomed out in solemn diapason. The effect was peculiar, especially when they began to embroider their performances with the passionate gestures of a German bass and an Italian tenor respectively. When it came to the part about "*Sifflez, sifflez, les cornets*", Gary could endure the strain no longer. With an explosive sound he made a last apoplectic attempt to restrain his mirth and then abandoned the attempt as impossible.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" roared Gary.

"Whoops!" cried the Prince. "Ho, ho, ho, ho, ho!"

"He, he, he, he!" Gary echoed.

The band played on, after a doubtful trip. The effect of shock produced in the faces of the diners-out was indescribable.

"Gosh, I can't bear it! Hoo, hoo, hoo, hoo!" said Gary, weeping uncontrollably.

For a little while they cried on each other's shoulders

"We will have some champagne," the Prince said
 "It is the night an, it is not good for us" He took
 Gary by the aimpit and said "We mus' be dignified
 Let us attempt the descent"

"You're absolulululy ri' l'" agreed Gary "Dignary l'"

With portentous solemnity they stumbled, as in a
 three-legged race, down the steps When they were
 half way, Gary began to sing again, beating time with
 his free hand to a posse of waiters arranged on either
 side of the stairs They flopped with immense relief
 at either side of a table

"My friend," said the Prince, "we are very drunk"

"Biandy l'" commanded Gary, waving his hand
 "Champagne l'"

"Let us drink," said the Prince, "to the Restoration"

"*The Restoration* l'" agreed Gary with vague enthu-
 siasm

They drank

"W-what restoration?"

"Oh, didn' you *know*?" said the Prince in the greatest
 possible surprise

"No," said Gary

"Mine l'" declared the Prince "Funniest thing I
 ever heard of"

"Your *what*?" asked Gary, puzzled

"You'll laugh like anything when I tell you," said
 the Prince "My *restoration* l'"

He leaned back and waited for Gary to see the joke,
 his eyebrows raised in delighted anticipation

"*Your* restoration?" stuttered Gary, his mouth half-
 open as the hilarious possibilities of the idea became
 slowly clear

"Ha l'" said the Prince

"Ha, ha l'" said Gary

"Ha, ha, ha, ha l'" said the Prince

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha l'" cried the Prince and
 Gary together, giving way to it with the greatest possible
 uproariousness and appreciation

"I *knew* you'd laugh when I told you," cried the Prince, gasping for breath "It's the funniest damn' thing, the funniest damn' thing, the funniest——"

"*Your restoration!*" spluttered Gary, holding his sides "Ho, ho, ho, ho! Ha, ha, ha, ha "

"I'm going to sit on the *throne* again!"

"*Don't!*" said Gary "*Don't!* It hurts!" He clutched the stitch in his side while he fought for breath and then went into further paroxysms

The Prince waited for him to finish with good-tempered benevolence "Lissen!" said the Prince "Lisseno man!" He beckoned unsteadily "Put your head here I'm going to tell you a sta' secret "

"Sta' secret?"

"Sta' secret "

"Jus' a minute," said Gary "I'll come closer" He shuffled his chair along "Is that close enough?"

"Closer!" said the Prince

"Closer still?"

"Closer "

"How's at?"

"That's very good Now," said the Prince "Sta' secret See? Mustn' tell to a living soul "

"Sta' secret," said Gary "Goo' as gold "

"*Platinum!*" corrected the Prince

"All ri'," agreed Gary "Platinum "

"Is tha' the mos' 'pensive metal?"

"I don' know "

"Waiter! Which is the mos' 'pensive metal?"

"Radium, *Altesse!*"

"Is that a metal?"

"Who cares," said Gary recklessly "Radium "

"Radium!" agreed the Prince "Now is that qui' understood?"

"Absolululy "

"Very well then I'm-going-to-marry-a-cousin-of-mine-by-divorce "

"No!"

"Yes! And we're going to have a revolution See? We're going to wipe ou' all the dirry-little democrats Afterwards, we're going to sit on the throne together"

"Goo' Lord!" said Gary

"But I don't love her"

"No?"

"No I love *her*" The Prince fumbled in several of his pockets and brought out, with difficulty, a rather crumpled photograph of a saucy young lady with black hair, lying on a couch, with no clothes on, and one foot in the air, and waved it under Gary's nose

"Tha's a *marvellous* girl!" exclaimed Gary, deeply impressed

"Isn't she a *marvellous* girl?"

"She's *marvellous*" Gary agreed

"Kiki," said the Prince "When I am on my throne I shall arrange for a *petite morganatique*"

"Can you do that?"

"Do anything! *You*," said the Prince, "shall be my Grand Vizier"

"Wazzat?"

"Show you Waiter!"

"*Altesse*?"

"Bring me a large knife The very larges' knife-in-a-place A long, curly, carving knife"

"*Très bien, Altesse*"

"Now," said the Prince "Kneel down, please"

"Will it hurt?" Gary asked

"Sometimes," said the Prince, "it's a little dangerous for the ears Otherwise's all right" He took a large carving-knife which the waiter handed him and flourished it "You will kneel, please"

"On floor?"

"Cer'nly," said the Prince "What is your name?"

Gary knelt

"Williams," he said "Gary Williams"

"Thass very good," said the Prince "On both knees, please It is more cosy"

"Like this?"

"Mind that left ear," said the Prince "*I knight you Grand Vizier, Gary Williams, of the Principality of Monte Cristo!*" He brought the knife down with wavering caution on Gary's shoulder "It is not bleeding?"

"No, no"

"You can rise, Sir Gary"

"Do I get up now?"

"If you can," said the Prince "Otherwise's not important"

"Always rise," announced Gary, "in the presence of Royalty"

He rose, with the assistance of two waiters

"Quite right," said the Prince "You are on our side?"

"Goo' Lord, no!" said Gary "I'm a spy"

"I'm delight'ed to make your acquaintance," said the Prince cordially

"You see, I'm in love with the Princess Steph!"

The Prince's eyes opened with surprise, one after the other

"With Her Hereditary Highness, *Princess Stephanie of Monte Cristo!*"

"I think she's *swell!*"

The Prince exploded into peals of merriment Gary stared at him uncertainly

"Hey! Whasso funny?"

It was a long time before the Prince could reply He pointed at Gary He flapped his hands He whooped, as in whooping-cough

"Cosy!" managed the Prince at last, between breathless spells "When you're Gran'vizier—arrange little *morganatique!*"

The notion appealed to Gary forcefully After one delighted instant of revelation he threw back his head and bellowed

"Ha, ha!" said Gary "Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

The Prince became suspicious "Is there a—iserajoke somewhere?"

"Ha!" said Gary "Ha, ha! Not going—ha, ha! Not going a *be* Gran'vizier!"

The Prince took several deep breaths in preparation for a fresh outburst "Not going a *be*?"

"No! Ha, ha! Ha, ha! I'm going a *stop* the relution!"

The Prince almost fell out of his seat with delight

"*How*?" he demanded enthusiastically "How?"

"Being *paid*!" Gary said between bouts of inarticulateness "Being paid—ha, ha!—a hundred a week to—to *marry the Princess Steph*! Can you beat that?"

"No!" said the Prince "No, ho, ho, ho! Hoo, don't make me laugh! Hoo, hoo, hoo, hoo, hoo! By old Reynaud?"

Gary did his best to reply. He took his head in his hands. He leaned back in his chair. He flapped with his hands. He thumped his chest. "*Yes!*" he wheezed.

It was the Prince's turn. He crowed. Gary distinctly remembered that he crowed. That was almost the last thing Gary did remember. The place went round. Not regularly round, but round with a dip in the middle, so that it possessed a curiously wobbling motion, like a swashplate. He had a bewildered recollection that the Prince had said that they must find Cousin Stephanie immediately, and that, supporting each other about the neck and chirruping like crickets, they had tottered through whirling, flashing, intermittent lights to the foot of the staircase, that they had toiled unendingly up interminable seesawing, yawning steps, and that by cleverly synchronizing their own motions with the motions of the hall, they had emerged safely into an unexpectedly sunlit street. He was quite certain that their intention had been to find Stephanie immediately. The Prince knew a place. He kept waving a finger in the air and tapping his nose and saying that he knew a place. He

approached the taxi door, not the driver's door, but the door into the body of the cab Gary felt pretty positive about that

"We find Cousin Stephanie immediatly," said the Prince "I know a place!"

He opened the door of his cab with an unnecessarily sweeping flourish, ushered Gary inside, paused to give directions as to how to find this place to the non-existent driver, climbed elaborately up the two steps into the cab, closed the door, and sat down beside Gary on the seat

Somehow or other Gary remembered this happening before he went to sleep And yet there was a doubt in his mind, because when he woke up it was to find himself in bed at the Ritz The only souvenir which remained of last night was an envelope beside him on the pillow addressed in flowing script "The Grand Vizier" He opened it and found a card, a largish card, printed in these terms

Mademoiselle Stephanie Dubois
Leçons de chansons
14bis Rue de la Boétie,
Paris 8

He did not like to enquire too closely into the meaning of these things, because at that a moment a key turned in his door, and the door opened He feigned sleep, and the second-floor waiter, who had been his second, entered with an ice-pack and placed it on his forehead

"Ice, monsieur," said the invaluable fellow "For one who has been wounded in a duel"

PART FOUR

CHAPTER NINE

THE RUE DE LA BOÉTIE PROVED TO BE ONE OF THOSE surprisingly broad, unsuspected, but at the same time indisputable thoroughfares, the knowledge of whose existence is cherished entirely by Frenchmen

It led from a point quite close behind the Lido Arcade, where the young lady in *maillot de bain* still demonstrated the exerciser in the sports shop. It ran northward from this place into those undiscovered regions where no Englishman has ever set foot, and it was composed almost exclusively of furniture shops, tapestry shops, lampshade shops, statuary shops, and shops where they sold lavatory fittings, regularly spaced between the dark, sombre doorways into office courtyards

It was through one of these doorways that Gary found his way, between tall doors of that poisonous-looking wood which grows nowhere on earth except in French doorways, and a dark passage with a lighted window in it through which a man in shirt-sleeves could be seen asleep. Beyond lay a courtyard piled high with lit windows, filled with the racket and the reek of cooking and the clatter of typewriters. Gary wandered around forlornly in this roofless cavern and then came upon a staircase going up. This bore upon its wall, besides elaborate regulations for the behaviour of its inhabitants in case of fire, the numbers "12-32". The staircase was broad, vast and dingy, and had an iron rail. There was a lift in the middle of it, but that, as is the custom with French lifts, showed only the loop of a steel rope and an irregular piece of cardboard dangling from the handle of the gate bearing the word "*Reparations*". Gary bounded up. The door was on the seventh floor, and bore two faded visiting-cards in

tarnished brass frames One read "Mademoiselle Lestrangle", the other "Mademoiselle Dubois" Gary removed his hat, licked his lips, rung the bell and waited, wiping his feet on an imaginary doormat

Presently the door was opened a crack, and a narrow vertical section of rather a distinguished woman became visible, with white hair, a species of tea-gown, and some embroidery in her hand

"Er—er—Mademoiselle Dubois?"

"*Vous avez un rendezvous, monsieur?*"

"No, no!" said Gary, backing a step "Nothing like that"

"You have an appointment, young man?"

"Oh," said Gary "Oh, I see what you mean No, not exactly, but I'd like to make an enquiry about some—er—about some—er——"

"Vacuum cleaners?"

"Now, sister! Do I look like one of those cleaner guys?"

"Exactly, monsieur"

"O K, sister I asked for it" He leaned confidentially "What I really want is singing lessons"

"I am the Grand Duchess Eulalie of Monte Cristo," said the lady "*Entrez, monsieur*"

"Gosh!" said Gary, dropping his jaw "Gee, I'm terribly sorry, your—your—er"

"Grace"

"Your Grace But honestly—I mean I'm one of these impulsive guys—I mean I wouldn't have called you 'sister'"

"I find it very anti-snob," said the lady "Will you come this way?"

"Yeah," said Gary nervously, fingering his hat "I guess it does have a kind of neighbourly sound, but all the same——"

"Will you sit down, please?"

"Thanks, Your Grace," said Gary, sitting stiffly on the edge of the chair

They were in one half of a double room, of which the other half was divided off by double-folding doors. From the further side of these came the firm notes of a piano playing insistent chords, and a small voice climbing up arpeggios, a semitone at a time.

The Grand Duchess seated herself on the edge of a chair at the furthest possible distance from Gary and went on with her embroidery.

Gary twiddled his hat uneasily and looked about him with his eyes without moving his face. Shabby genteel. His lips pursed into a soundless whistle. Half a dozen round walnut chairs, four of them covered in black horsehair, the other two in the sort of embroidery the Grand Duchess was working. A threadbare carpet. A table in the centre, of the round, French Victorian variety, bearing a carafe of water stoppered by a tumbler. Black marks on the walls where the radiator stood. Over all the curiously desolate air which is produced by the sound of vocal exercises in the morning.

For twenty minutes Gary and the Grand Duchess sat. The Grand Duchess thrust and pulled with her needle. Gary whistled silent arpeggios, threw glances at the Grand Duchess, made an elaborate examination of the foreshortened view of his ankles from a point somewhere between his knees, and waited.

The arpeggios ceased. The lid of the piano descended with a slap of finality. Something happened to Gary's pulse. On the other side of the door a window opened. Then the door-handle began to tremble and to make perceptible but insufficient arcs, as if a very small child were reaching for it. At length the door opened and a very small child came out. It was a small boy of about six, at once dignified and made ridiculous by large spectacles, a beret, a studious expression, short socks, and a music-case of rich light leather with the initials B F. This infant removed his beret, bobbed to the Grand Duchess in something nearly approximating

to a curtsey, looked at Gary without interest, made an unfortunate noise, and withdrew. A moment later the door opened widely and Stephanie was there.

She was wearing a woollen jumper and a nondescript skirt, and as Gary stumbled awkwardly to his great height she stopped abruptly and said "Oh!"

The Grand Duchess went on with her work.

"Why—er—hello!" said Gary, with a swallow.

The Princess Stephanie glanced at her aunt.

"You—wished to see me, monsieur?"

"That's right," said Gary. "You see—I—happened to be alone in Paris—with—er—time—time heavy on my hands—so I thought to myself, 'Maybe some singing lessons——'"

"I see," said Stephanie. "You have been trained?"

"Well, no," Gary admitted. "Not exactly. I'm just naturally attracted, I guess."

"And you were recommended by somebody?"

"Sure. Prince Paul."

"Paul!"

"Yeah. He spoke very highly of you—er—Miss Dubois."

"You know him?"

"We're like that," Gary said, exhibiting two intertwined fingers.

She received this intelligence with a nod of understanding.

"My lessons are forty-five francs an hour."

Gary looked at his watch.

"Well," he said suggestively, "it's a quarter of twelve."

She turned on her heels, went back into the music room with a smile.

Gary hesitated. He appealed to the Grand Duchess.

"Do I go in now?"

"We may as well," said the Grand Duchess, rising.

Gary's face did not hide his dismay.

"Oh—er—I don't want to disturb *you*, Your Grace."

"I am tremendously chaperone," replied the Grand Duchess haughtily

She went towards the door, and after a moment's delay he rushed to hold it open for her with a not altogether successful attempt at the formality appropriate in Court circles

The Grand Duchess took up her position by one of the windows and was soon busily at work The Princess Stephanie opened the piano and sat down Gary hesitated in the doorway and then closed the door behind him, and came forward on tiptoe

The Princess struck a chord

"Sing '*ah*,'" she said

Gary shuffled with his feet

"I—er—I'm one of these nervous guys," he explained "Do I have to lift up my voice in—er"—he indicated the Grand Duchess—"in public?"

"Young man," said the Grand Duchess severely, "although Her Hereditary Highness is incognito, I am here to ensure that the respect due to Royalty is maintained You will do as Mademoiselle Dubois directs"

Gary raised his eyebrows

"Oh," he said "I'm sorry—Your Grace"

The Duchess nodded

"*Ah*," said Stephanie, striking the chord again

Gary swallowed

"*Ah*," he sang

The Princess played a different chord

"*Ah*," sang Gary

The Princess struck again

"Still just *ah*?"

The Princess nodded

"*Ah*," Gary sang

The Princess played another chord

Gary made a face

"Gosh darn it, doesn't a fellow get a chance to say anything but '*ah*' around this place?"

The Princess smiled and allowed her hands to slide from the keyboard

"You must try," she explained patiently, "to make it more from the diaphragm "

"Say!" exclaimed Gary cooly "What does a girl like you know about diaphragms?"

The Duchess put down her embroidery

"Ah," sang Gary hastily

"Louder," said the Princess, playing the chord again

"Ah," sang Gary, letting himself go to the sound

"That is better," said Stephanie "But it must still come more from here "

She indicated the centre of her person in a modest way, which appealed irresistibly to one of those amorous guys

Gary swallowed again

"How would it be," he suggested, "if I were to stand over there?"

He went over to the fireplace and stood with his back to it, wearing a suspiciously guileless expression

For a moment she looked puzzled, and then, dismissing her suspicions, struck another chord

"We will try the scale," she suggested

"Do I start at the top and work down to the bottom?"

"You start at the bottom and work up to the top"

"O K," said Gary, taking a deep breath "Ah, ah, ah, ah"—his hand behind his back was feeling for the bell—"ah, ah, ah"

"Again," said the Princess "More quickly"

"Ah, ah, ah," sang Gary dutifully, "ah, ah, ah, ah, AH!" A bell resounded through the place

The Duchess looked up sharply Gary became interested in the ceiling

The Princess went a semitone higher

"Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah," sang Gary The bell pealed again

The Princess mounted another semitone This time the bell was insistent

The Grand Duchess put down her work, rose, and went across to the door Gary bounded to open it for her She thanked him with a nod and swept out He closed it rapidly behind her

"Steph!" said Gary urgently "I've got to talk to you alone!"

Stephanie played another chord

"Ah," bellowed Gary for the benefit of the Grand Duchess "I don't care if you are a Princess! I must see you! Lunch with me! Tea with me! Come for a walk with me!"

She played a chord "How did you find me here?"

Gary smiled "I'm one of these persistent guys Ah!"

The Grand Duchess re-entered

"A most extraordinary thing," she muttered "There was nobody there"

"Maybe," said Gary, moving over towards the fireplace, "whoever it is will be back"

Stephanie looked at Gary sharply, and received a look of perfect innocence in reply The bell rang again

"You were quite right!" exclaimed the Grand Duchess

"Allow *me* to go, Your Grace," Gary begged politely, "or would that interrupt the lesson?"

He moved away from the bell, and the Grand Duchess's eye fell upon it immediately with an expressionless stare, and lingered

"Oh, *would* you?" exclaimed the Grand Duchess gratefully "That would be so kind"

Stephanie hid her face

Gary arched his back and buttoned his coat with exasperation

"It'd be a pleasure!" he declared grimly, marching out ridiculously with the Grand Duchess's eye upon him He arrived on the empty landing, grinned sheepishly at it, and scratched his cheek.

"*Urtcha*!" he exclaimed with sudden vehemence "Get away from there, will you, or I'll kick the seat off your pants!"

He growled with convincing ferocity and then, smiling to himself and dusting his hands in satisfaction, he altered the set of his coat about his shoulders and went back to face two blank pairs of eyes

"Couple of kids," he announced "I got rid of 'em"

He gathered the last shreds of his dignity about him and moved over to his position by the fireplace The Grand Duchess and Her Hereditary Highness Princess Stephanie exchanged glances

"Let us try *ee*," said Stephanie, striking a chord

"Just *ee*?"

"Just *ee*"

"*Ee*," Gary sang

The bell rang

Gary shifted uncomfortably The Duchess calmly went on with her embroidery Stephanie struck another chord

The bell rang again

"*Ee*," sang Gary

The bell rang passionately and insistently

The Grand Duchess stared hard at Gary Stephanie stared hard too Gary ostentatiously put his hands in his pockets

The bell went on ringing Gary began to whistle, and, suddenly remembering where he was, stopped Stephanie turned Gary moved away, and the Grand Duchess's eye fell once more balefully upon the bell, which continued to ring for a few seconds, and then ceased

"Well?" said the Grand Duchess "Stephanie, my dear, what are you thinking about?"

"I am sorry," said Stephanie, striking another chord

"*Ee*," sang Gary, as romantically as possible, considering the circumstances

"A scale," said Stephanie

"*Ee, ee, ee, ee, ee, ee,*" sang Gary

The bell rang, not continuously this time, but in impatient intermittent appeals Stephanie suddenly broke off from her playing The Grand Duchess stared at the offending bell-push as if hypnotized

"I'll get it," said Gary, going once more towards the door

This time he found a pale young man in spectacles, who bowed with servility, and, at the same time, with some offensiveness He pulled a large sheet of paper out of an attaché-case and handed it to Gary with a great deal of voluble explanation in French Gary had seen French bills before, with their sevens crossed like f's, and their spidery writing, and their orderly presentation of astronomical sums

"Yeah Yeah I know," said Gary, interrupting the flow of logical and neatly reasoned expostulations "You're the guy who's introduced at the psychological moment, to make it quite clear that the family need something to use or money "

"Monsieur ?" queried the man, suddenly baffled

"You want the rent," said Gary

"*Oui, oui !*" exclaimed the clerk, beaming through his glasses with delight and understanding "I too have been to the Biograph I speak the American You pay, or outa you go ! Hotsy totsyt !"

"That's a swell Park Avenue accent you've got there," said Gary "I pay and outa you go "

"You *pay* ? Aha," said the clerk, becoming suddenly human "*Elle est jolie, eh ? Cette petite amie la ! Oho ! Je comprends* "

"I don't know what you're saying," said Gary, "but I know a dirty look when I see one " He did an instantaneous sum in his head and pulled out twenty pounds, wrote something on the bill and handed it over "Now beat it, hotsy totsyt !"

"*Très bien* Okey dokey," said the clerk genially,

bowing, sweating with pallid if vicarious sexual gratification, and trotting down the stairs

Gary shoved his hands in his trouser pockets and strode back into the room

"More of these damned kids," he announced "I fixed 'em Are we still on *ee*?"

"O," said Stephanie, striking a chord

"No," said Gary, "not O I feel more interested in U"

"That is very neat," observed the Grand Duchess approvingly, putting down her work

"Glad you liked it, ma'am I'm one of these natural wisecrackers"

"You have a wit, monsieur I am much interested in young men with wit"

"Say, that's great! I can see you and I are going to string along"

"How deliciously cowboy," said the Grand Duchess

"It is so refreshing to us who are used to the effete mannerisms of the European Courts You may call me 'Duchess'"

"Thanks," said Gary "Thanks, Duchess Mind you, I can be as effete as the next guy when I'm in the mood" He looked at her with the greatest possible gallantry

"My dear boy!" exclaimed the Grand Duchess "This is absolutely courtier! You must come and see us socially"

"That's darned nice of you," said Gary

"Um—my niece, the Princess, has instructed me to say that she would be pleased if you would afford her the pleasure of your company on the night of the seventeenth White ties and decorations will be worn"

"Sister," said Gary, pressing his advantage, "I should be tickled to death"

The Grand Duchess was vastly amused at this She chortled with laughter

"Oh dear," said the Duchess, wiping her eyes, "you are so *beautifully* Yankee"

"Shall we begin again with *ah*?" interrupted Stephanie, playing a chord

"Just a minute," said Gary "Where do I present myself?"

"Oh, here," the Duchess told him "We have no other home, you know We cannot possibly afford a proper residence *and* an *atelier* So many of us ex-Royalty are so very impoverished Still, I suppose we *are* picturesque, you know Sometimes I feel completely Ruritanian"

"I see what you mean," said Gary seriously

"*Ah*," pleaded Stephanie "Please *ah* Try to make it come from the diaphragm"

"Diaphragm nothing!" cried Gary, gazing at the Duchess "I do my chest notes from the heart"

Whereat Stephanie blushed, and the Grand Duchess went on with her embroidery with much of the expression of a cat which is stroked

CHAPTER TEN

THERE WAS SOMETHING REMARKABLY BLITHE ABOUT the streets of Paris at one o'clock that afternoon

As Gary came down the staircase whose steps he had mounted laboriously one hour before he seemed to be able to spiral down without touching any steps at all. The courtyard which had seemed so gloomy now blazed with heavenly and exultant light. The Rue de la Boetie became suddenly a thoroughfare of unexampled majesty and splendour. The art shops shone with masterpieces. The furniture shops were resplendent. The traffic, zigzagging along the street, was transformed, as if by a magic touch, into a glittering parade of coaches. Even the lavatory pans seemed fairylike and the big post office of the eighth *arrondissement* an elfin palace.

There were many normal Parisians, untouched by magic, who hurried along their familiar street on what seemed to them an ordinary dullish day, who were struck by the spectacle of this very tall American as he strode among them with a beatific smile upon his face, wagging his head, and stopping every now and then to gaze with unseeing transports at this or that, so that they turned to stare. Sometimes they heard his voice, and stopped to listen with astonishment to his reiterated, "Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy!"

There was one man whose normal condition of exhilaration enabled him to rise to equal heights of dizzy exultation, who came tearing with his customary dash past all the other traffic in a taxi with wicker-work doors. He saw Gary and flung himself to a halt beside him, digging his tyres into the road with a squeal which made nervous pedestrians jump.

"Aha!" said the Prince. "My spy! My boon

companion ! My Grand Vizier ! And how are you this morning ?”

“Hello, Prince !” exclaimed Gary with a wide grin, seizing his hand and pump-handling it “Say, I feel fine ! Say, I could flatten this town with a sweep of the hand ! I could push over the Arc de Triomphe with one finger ! I could stop a revolution with one look ! D’you want to fight ?”

“My friend,” said the Prince, “I know this feeling You are in love ”

“Hell, no !” said Gary modestly

“The Rue de la Boétie,” said the Prince thoughtfully, as if doing sums, “a hundred metres from the number 14bis—I put two and two together You have seen my cousin Stephanie ? You have said “Ah” from the diaphragm ? Last night you were very drunk ? Today you wish to demolish the Arc of Napoleon ? Poufi, my friend One does not have to be a mathematician ”

“Shut up, will you ? I’m one of these bashful guys ”

The Prince leaned out of his cab and clapped him affectionately on the shoulder

“I can drive you somewhere, my Grand Vizier ? To Monsieur Reynaud ? This emotion has not ruined the appetite for conspiracy ?”

“Say ! Talking of appetites ! Where do you generally lunch when you’re in heaven ?”

“There is a small cabman’s shelter near the Pont Alexandre IV I lunch there most days with some officers of the Imperial Guard ”

“Nuh-uh,” said Gary “This is on me Drive to the Ritz ”

The Prince looked wistful

“Ah no, my friend The Ritz is not for taxi-drivers, you understand ”

“Okay for princes, though ?”

“But I am never a Prince before twelve o’clock at night ”

"Oh, just this once "

The Prince looked like a small boy outside a sweet-shop

"Will they have *pêches flambées au kirsch* ?"

"That's a bargain "

"And definitely no champagne ?"

"Say ! I thought you inhaled champagne ?"

"There are times," said the Prince solemnly, "when I wish the Germans would have won the war Then there would be for me no more champagne "

"Hey !" exclaimed Gary "Am I in love, or something ?"

"For us princes," exclaimed the Prince, "the champagne is free It is perks I give a cachet to the establishment *Eh bien*, there is a bottle of champagne But only one, *voyez vous* ! You understand ? Only one "

"Is *that* why you drink one bottle in every place when you celebrate ?"

"It is for no other reason," said the Prince, shrugging "My friend, there are times when I would sell my soul for some food For one long, consecutive meal, eaten at the same table from start to finish " His eyes narrowed "One might have, *par exemple*, some *tortue clair* And then, perhaps an *œuf en gélée de vin blanc* And then—who knows ?—some trout from Lac Lemman, fried in butter, you understand, and with no sauces A piece of lemon, perhaps, but no sauces And then," the Prince swallowed, "a *Chateaubriand Marchand de Vin* A bottle of Chambertin *avec, et après ça*"—the Prince sighed—" *pêches flambées au kirsch* " He stretched back his arm and opened the door of the cab with a melancholy sigh "*Entrez, monsieur* "

"Say, can't I ride with you ?"

"Only after midnight, *mon vieux* It is like Cinderella the other way round I am under a spell You will forgive me if I go home first to change my things ?"

"Change anything you want," Gary said, climbing in The Prince turned his head

"You will meet the faithful Timmins," said the Prince through the window, at the same time doing things to the traffic

"Oh yeah?"

"He is my *aide-de-camp* after midnight In the daytime he is my *valet de chambre* Before that he was my Oxford scout He is very faithful He works for no money He loves me like a son After the revolution he will be my Lord High Chamberlain I have promised him "

Gary frowned as he bounced on his seat

"So there is going to be a revolution?"

"A very little revolution," said the Prince "There will be not many dead "

"Can you beat that!"

"A few *croupiers* perhaps They are very loyal "

"Gosh, that's terrible!"

"I should not have told you this," said the Prince "You are on the other side "

"Come to think of it," Gary answered, "I ought never to have let on about that "

The Prince shrugged and darted beneath the forelegs of a plunging horse "We have been at Oxford together," he said "I am French You are American We know how to behave like the sons of English gentlemen "

"Say, you ought to amuse Aunt Eulalie "

"Ah! You have met her? You get on well? It is a very subtle propaganda that we make "

"What is?" demanded Gary

"We are very nice people," the Prince said "We have charm We are very picturesque for the visiting Americans "

Gary clutched the arm-rest suddenly "You told her about—about me?" said Gary

"Ah, no!" the Prince said "That would not be necessary I am the *Chef de Propagande* We shall win you over After all," the Prince added, braking to a

stop so violently that he flung Gary into a crouching position on the floor, "*there is always love* We have arrived "

"Do you believe in miracles ?"

The Prince laughed, and sounded a pom-tiddle-om-pom on his horn They were in a narrow, shabby street, flanked on one side by bill-boards, and on the other by tall houses of a uniform and melancholy grey with every window shuttered

Presently a young woman with the hair of a Japanese doll and a clever impression of being naked under her overcoat, came out of the doorway, tripped down the four steps with bare legs, and disappeared at a simpering run Then a barrel-shaped woman with a large flexible shopping basket and a bun appeared, mounted the four steps entirely with the use of one hip, and let herself in with a key From a piano somewhere came the tinkly sound of French dance music It ceased abruptly on a discord, and a moment later a collarless young man with wild black hair and a social-revolutionary look precipitated himself through the door, banged it behind him, raised nervous claws to heaven, and dashed away, apparently intent upon suicide Then an elderly man came out in the careful habiliment of servitude, and the grey hairs and boyish look of one who has grown old in the service of youth He hastened down the steps with an expression of mild surprise

"Back early, Your 'Ighness !"

"Ninety-three francs, seven It is not bad, eh ?"

"No indeed, Your 'Ighness ! I call that very good indeed, considering the state of the tourist traffic "

"Timmins, I wish to present Monsieur Williams, of St John's "

Timmins face creased with pleasure

"Oh, indeed, sir I'm *very* glad to meet you, sir When were you up, sir ?"

"Glad to know you, Timmins I'm technically in residence this minute "

"Oh, indeed, sir And how is the old place, might I ask?"

"Getting older every minute," said Gary "Those guys certainly built for keeps"

"And the Dean, sir? Mr Walker?"

"Still going strong," said Gary

"A firm believer in discipline, Mr Williams"

"Timmins," said the Prince, "I wish to become a gentleman for about one hour"

"Yes, Your 'Ighness Very good, Your 'Ighness"

"Will you fetch the accessories? I have been asked by Mr Williams to lunch at the Ritz"

"Certainly, Your 'Ighness I won't be a minute, Your 'Ighness"

Mr Timmins hastened up the steps, and after a short interval returned bearing a camel-hair coat and a bowler hat

The Prince alighted from his taxi while his *aide-de-camp* held the door, and then suffered himself to be divested of his leather coat and cap, and to be re-invested with these vestiges of Continental and slightly flush gentility

"That is very cosy," said the Prince

"Yes, Your 'Ighness"

Mr Timmins then produced a long ivory cigarette-holder, placed a cigarette in it, handed it to the Prince, and politely worked a lighter When the cigarette was going nicely he extinguished the flame and produced from another waistcoat pocket a small chamois case from which he extracted one gentleman's plain meniscus monocle

The Prince breathed upon it, polished it with the belt on his coat and screwed it home with a little swagger

"Is that better, Timmins?"

"Much better, Your 'Ighness Will you be requiring the car, Your 'Ighness?"

The Prince quizzed Gary through his glass

"My friend ——" he began, and then stopped "No, no," he said "It is too much"

"What's too much?" asked Gary

"My friend," said the Prince with a curious meekness, "could we afford—could we *possibly* afford—that is—to take a taxi? After the revolution—naturally—I would reimburse you from the Treasury"

Gary shouted with delight

"Sure!" he yelled "Sure we'll have a taxi! Hey there! Hey there! Taxi!"

The street was empty

The Prince put a hand on his arm

"Please," he said "My simple pleasures Allow me"

He elevated his cigarette about five inches in the air with an imperious gesture From the far end of the shabby street a taxi saw the faintly perceptible sign and came rushing along The Prince waited on the kerbstone, inhaling the foul fresh air with every appearance of freedom

Mr Timmins opened the door

"After you," said Gary.

"No, no," demurred the Prince, "after *you*"

"Oh, thanks," said Gary

The Prince looked his colleague fiercely in the eye

"Ritz," said the Prince, with a casual nod, and somehow there was a wealth of significance in the simple word

They set forth at a sober pace The Prince leant forward and surveyed the passing scene with a professional and yet a childlike intent He observed the legs of the ladies, the lines of fine cars, the efficiency of the gendarme on point duty, the taste of a window decoration, and once in a traffic block he caught the eye of a pretty lady with monkey fur in her hat and held it to the point of embarrassment with a stare of the frankest possible interest All the while Gary studied his man from the corner of one eye

"I suppose," he said at length, "you realize I shall be several thousands to the good if I put a tablet of prussic acid in your soup?"

"Ah no, monsieur I beg of you Not in the *tortue clair* Save that at least for the *pêches flambées au kirsch*"

Gary smiled

"It was for that reason you have invited me?"

"Oh, I'm just making friends with the family"

"We are all friends together That will be very cosy"

"Sure I've got to stop this thing *somehow*!"

"You have a plan?"

"Well—I half thought of marrying the girl"

"The Prince nodded thoughtfully

"But there is me, my friend!"

"Yeah," agreed Gary "I thought I'd offer you money"

The Prince slowly took a fresh cigarette, placed it in his holder, and lit it from the first

"You can compete with the Treasury?"

The cab stopped The Princess Stephanie opened the door Her eyes were blazing

"My dear Cousin Stephanie!" the Prince exclaimed, stepping out, removing his bowler hat, bowing over her hand and kissing it

Gary's heart turned over six times beneath his ribs

"Allow me," said the Prince "May I present my friend Mr Williams? My dear, our New Grand Vizier Her Hereditary Highness Princess Stephanie of Monte Cristo"

Gary clambered out of the cab all smiles and reached for her hand

"Hallo, Steph," he said "May I do that too?"

The Princess Stephanie withdrew her hand as though his touch were ice

"Paul," she said, "this man has insulted me"

Gary stared.

"*I what ?*" he said

"You have insulted me," repeated Stephanie furiously "You have insulted my aunt the Princess Eulalie"

"Insulted your aunt ? Say, what is this ? What do you mean ?"

"You cheap Americans," said the Princess "You have no manners You have no delicacy You are—you are uncouth You know nothing of our aristocratic feelings, of our traditions How could you ? You are of the *nègres blancs* You think only of money You think the world can be bought and sold I tell you, monsieur, it is an insult that you behave like this"

"Now, Steph, Steph !" pleaded Gary soothingly "You're collecting a crowd"

"And make public what I have to say to you ? It will be very good that You are a monster ! You touch me in the deepest place I have, which is my pride I despise you because you do not understand You think you can buy human beings like you buy the copper mines and the cows"

Gary went pale

"Who put you wise ?" he asked quietly

"Wise !" she echoed "I do not have to be very wise I discover it for myself quite easily In five minutes after you leave it is in the letter-box for all the world to see To be made wise ! Are we then fools as well as poor ?"

"In the letter-box ? What letter-box ? What was in the letter-box ?"

"This," said Stephanie very loudly indeed, waving something in the air which she produced from her bag

"Oh, *that*," said Gary, deflating with relief

"That" was the paper covered with figures which the man had waved at him on the landing, now duly receipted at the bottom left-hand corner "For a moment you had me pretty shaken"

"Shaken ?"

"Forget it I'm one of these tactless but heart-in-the-right-place sort of guys It's a precious small service I can do for you and your aunt in return for the favour of your being alive Have you had lunch?"

"You wrote this on it yourself?" Stephanie demanded, thrusting the paper at him

He took the paper from her, held it to catch the light of the sky, and read out laboriously

"If you want to blackguard me, I'm staying at the Ritz Hotel—Gary"

He grinned

"Sure I wrote that"

"Why?"

"Oh, just one of those ruses"

"It was intolerable"

"Well, here we are, anyway. Have you had lunch?"

The Princess Stephanie also looked wistful

"I must insist," said the Princess, "that I receive your formal undertaking to allow me to reimburse you out of the State Treasury after the—after the——"

"After the revolution?" said Gary "I know all about that Cousin Paul A formal undertaking it is Shall we shake hands on that and go in to feed?"

She hesitated a moment, melted suddenly, then held out her hand.

He took it and pressed it gallantly to his lips

"For an uncouth American, how am I doing?"

"I did not mean that," she said "You are so generous that it—that it—it is so awkward"

"You can tell me all about it over some eats," said Gary, shepherding her through the swing-door and leading the way into the restaurant "Oh, waiter! For two"

"And Paul?"

"Beaten it," said Gary "I can't help liking that guy Do you want to sit facing the room, or could you bear it if I had the light on your face?"

"The room, please I am not very beautiful this morning "

"Lady," said Gary, "you little know !"

For a moment she frowned seriously across the table into his ardent stare Then the head waiter interrupted with two menus

"Hungry ?"

"You little know !"

"Waiter—the works "

"*Très bien, monsieur* Some *tortue clair, made-morselle* ? And after that an *omelette fore de volaille*, a mixed grill ?"

Gary nodded

"O K , maestro—for two "

"*Bien, monsieur* "

She tore her roll into little bits

"I have been thinking," she said, "that these Americanisms—they are—they are assumed, no ?"

Gary had the grace to blush

"Oh, well," he admitted, "when in Europe do as the Americans, etcetera They seem to expect it of me "

She studied his face

"Underneath you are a little serious ?"

"That's right," he said "I'm one of these knightly guys You know Vigils Arthurian effects Chivalrous, and bursting with ideals Gosh," he exclaimed, "when I fall in love it's going to be hell for somebody !"

She fell to breaking her bread again

"In what way ?"

"Just general sticking around and faithfulness I'm going to half kill them with loyalty "

"Them ?" she said

"Well, *you* know One "

"Why should that half kill one ?"

"It's apt to get a bit monotonous after a time "

"I do not think so," she said "I feel the same way "

For a moment he felt faint

"You *do* ?"

"For my country "

"Oh, *that* !"

"Please do not keep saying, 'Oh, that' "

"Say, you're pretty serious about all that sort of thing, aren't you ?"

She looked sideways

"If you like to talk in understatements, I feel—pretty serious "

He studied her covertly The waiter brought soup
The waiter brought omelettes The waiter brought mixed grill

"Is that your one and only love ?"

She looked at him

"So far——"

"Paul ?"

"It is the same thing "

"Duty first Pleasure afterwards I get it "

"It is not easy for you to understand," she said "I have not the freedom of the ordinary individual "

"You're human," he told her

"No," she corrected "I am a Princess "

"Same thing, isn't it ?"

"You said something about 'knightly' It is like that with me I am *dedicated* "

He smiled with disbelief

"One of these vestal virgins Is that why you ran out on me on the train ?"

"I did not run from you I ran from the little men "

"I remember I—er—I followed you down to Dijon "

She was astounded

"You followed me ? But I did not go to Dijon !"

"You're telling me "

She lowered her eyelashes

"Why did you follow me ?"

"Oh—I don't know Why *would* one of these

knightly guys go darting all over Europe in trains after one of these vestals?"

She looked at him under lowered brows. He stared into her eyes.

"So now we know," he said quietly.

Her face seemed suddenly to try to flutter into escape. Her eyes avoided his abruptly. Her lip trembled. He had a quick impression of beating wings.

"I must go," she said.

"No, no, Stephanie!"

"I must go," she repeated more loudly, and rose from the table, her throat turned sideways. He did not know why he particularly noticed her throat.

"Stephanie!" he said.

She ran from him suddenly, among the tables towards the door.

"Stephanie!" he cried, pounding his napkin on the table and standing up with a jerk which sent his chair backwards to the floor. "Hey! Stephanie!" He chased after her, while the heads turned. He caught her in the revolving-door. "Stephanie! Stephanie!" He crashed into the same partition and jammed it with his heel. There was a little fat man from Finland struggling with three suitcases in the opposite partition. "I'm not going to let you get away! Stop struggling, will you?" Gary said, and kissed her on the mouth. She submitted for one miraculous instant, and then struggled again, freed about eighteen inches of space, into the open air, and was away from him.

He fought to get through the gap but could not.

"Stephanie!"

He strove to enlarge the space, but the whole door was inextricably jammed with suitcases. When at length it consented to turn and the gentleman from Finland was inside and he was in the street, he was alone, it seemed to him, in the whole Place Vendôme.

No, not alone. The head waiter, strangely hatless,

oddly fungoid in the open air, hovered with two plates, each with its little burden of folded paper

"Your bills, monsieur "

"Bills ?"

"For yourselves, monsieur, and the gentleman who has just left "

"Gentleman ?" Gary puzzled through the items
Tortue clair Oeuf en gelée de vin blanc Chateau-
briand Marchand de Vin Pêches flambées au Kirsch

"I was to tell you, monsieur, in these words, that you asked him to lunch, but that he was one of those tactful guys "

Gary smiled and signed them both Then his eyes clouded again On a sudden impulse he signalled for a cab

"Monte Cristo office," he shouted "Champs Élysées "

CHAPTER ELEVEN

M REYNAUD WAS WELL PLEASED M REYNAUD SAT back in his office chair and rubbed his hands In the middle of M Reynaud's beard M Reynaud's neatly naked lips smiled with satisfaction

"So," said M Reynaud, "you have found her That is quite splendid I congratulate you And the nuptials?"

"Yeah," said Gary "Well, that's what I came to see you about"

He went to the window, jingling the coins in his pocket, and looked down on the moving picture of the Champs Élysées

When his face could not be seen, M Reynaud allowed his eye to wander over Gary's big, loose-knit figure analytically Then he took a silver pencil from the desk and moved a small pad within easy writing reach

"And the address?" asked M Reynaud

Gary stayed at the window, jogging one leg

"I—I've fallen in love," he announced

M Reynaud smiled, and made a little shrugging wave with his pencil

"Naturally!" he murmured "We were aware of that"

Gary turned his head

"What d'you mean? It only just happened!"

M Reynaud smiled and glanced into his beard

"You think so, monsieur? They tell me that on the Promenade des Anglais at Nice, some time ago, when you parted from Her *Altesse Héritaire*, the *grand passion* was implicit in every feature of your face *On m'a dit* that at the station here, when you learned she had disappeared, the same thing was remarked on by all beholders I myself, at Dijon"

Gary swung round and faced him

"Let us *alone*, will you?" he demanded fiercely

M Reynaud was surprised Frankly surprised
He frowned with evident astonishment

"I beg your pardon, monsieur I have no wish to
be the intruder—but——"

"But what?"

"If you would be so kind as to favour me with the
lady's address "

Gary thought

"I'm not going to give you her address," he said

"But *monsieur*! By the terms of our agreement "

"The deal's off," said Gary shortly

M Reynaud raised his eyebrows and looked down
the two sides of his beard alternately

"The deal's off, I tell you!" Gary repeated "And
let me tell you, I'm darned ashamed of myself I
went into this thing because I didn't understand the
aristocratic feelings of these people, their traditions
I didn't understand, see? I guess I was—I was
uncouth I thought people could be bought and sold
like we Americans buy and sell cows "

"Cows?" repeated M Reynaud with interest "Do
the Americans buy and sell many cows?"

"Millions of them What else could you expect?"

"Nothing," M Reynaud assured him "Nothing
I only acquire information "

"Well, now things have gotten serious, see?"

"And you have no wish to marry the girl?"

"I've *every* wish to marry the girl "

"Well, then " said M Reynaud with a sigh
of relief

Gary thumped the desk

"But not because I'm *paid* to do it, see?" he shouted
"I guess I feel pretty knightly about all this She's
vestal, that's what she is, if that means anything to
you at all "

"Nothing whatsoever," said M Reynaud calmly

"It means," said Gary, "that I'm going to ask Stephanie to marry me because I love her, do you understand? I'm not going to have any mixed motives about this Love, see? Not lucre I don't want your lousy money After all, what is money? Dross"

M Reynaud entered upon a resigned expression

"So," said he, drawing the Stars and Stripes upon the pad, "the deal is off *C'est dommage, ça*"

"What's that?"

"I say it is a pity"

"Who says it's a pity?"

"It is a pity that you will lose a nice wedding present of five thousand pounds, an income of two thousand pounds a year, access to the bathing beaches, to the International Sporting Club, to the Casino——"

"Yeh, yeh, I know!"

"Naturally," continued M Reynaud, drawing the French Tricolour next to the Stars and Stripes and crossing their sticks symbolically, "you will have no right to the two hundred pounds which I paid you That, my friend, will be returnable You can afford that?"

"Well, not at the moment," admitted Gary, taken aback "But I'll get it for you If you wait while I write to my old man——"

"I'm afraid I must ask you to do that," said M Reynaud severely

"Yeah Sure"

"And then we shall have to revert to our former methods"

"What sort of methods?"

M Reynaud shrugged deprecatingly

"Unfortunately I have no longer a Delage, but there are other cars in Paris Paris is *full* of cars There are little accidents here, there, every day I assure you that nobody takes much notice It is inevitable It is the Gallic temperament"

"You mean that you—you'd make attempts on her life?"

"Nothing so crude, monsieur, but there are ways of preventing a marriage short of an actual liquidation of the high contracting parties. A broken limb, perhaps. An ambulance. A little private hospital somewhere in the country. It would be very discreet. Undoubtedly there are ways."

Gary thrust out his jaw and faced him.

"Say, listen, Mister Reynaud. If you think you can frighten me by making threats of that kind you little know Mrs. Williams' kid Gary."

"It will not be necessary. Let us hope it will not be necessary. After all, you are in love with her. *Alors*, you will marry her. That is all I ask, monsieur."

"Say!" yelled Gary. "Haven't I made this plain to you yet? *I tell you——*"

"Yes, yes, yes," said M. Reynaud soothingly. "But not for money. If you will marry her not for money, that is all the better for the *Hôtel du Palais* and the *Société des Bains de Mer*."

Gary swallowed three times in his throat.

"God rest you, merry gentleman!" he said wittingly, and went.

M. Reynaud's laughter floated out, for a moment, over the Champs Élysées.

CHAPTER TWELVE

IN THE RUE DE LA BOÉTIE SOMETHING STIRRED

The shops were shut. The neon lights had flashed their last zigzags of reflection across the pavement. The wet roadway was given to the raindrops and to the dim, patient pools of illumination from the street lamps. Yet there were footsteps in the deserted street, and at intervals of a few minutes solitary taxis hove in sight, made lines down the serene contentment of its surface, halted for a moment with engine thrumming, and went away, leaving the place again to silence and the rain.

Before the door of number fourteen an awning stretched in the shadows, and from its curtained windows came the muted strains of music, oddly secretive, almost furtive in its merriment. Paris is like that. There is a life lived in the streets, and there is another life lived behind the impenetrable grey fronts and the jealous shutters.

A taxi and a tall figure wearing a tuxedo and sheltering under an umbrella arrived together.

The door of the taxi opened and a man stepped out. Gary obtained a discreet view of a cloak, a white bow tie, and of a gleaming cross. He hovered politely under his umbrella. The man thrust a five-franc note at the taxi-driver and returned to the assistance of a lady in white ermine with a pearl tiara. They ducked under the awning and hurried within. Gary furled his umbrella and went in behind.

The little party walked past the unlighted concierge's window, through the courtyard whose ladders of windows were now unlit, to the foot of the stairs which Gary had ascended for his music lesson.

The piece of cardboard still dangled from the handle of the lift, but at the corner of the banisters there stood, as immobile as a statue, a flunkey, resplendent in red plush

"*Marche pas ?*" asked the gentleman of this individual, jerking his silk hat at the lift

"*Faut monter par ici, monsieur,*" replied the flunkey, indicating the stairs with a white-gloved hand

The gentleman grumbled and gave an arm to his lady They were middle-aged, and they began the ascent with the ungainly dignity of penguins

Gary followed

At the second landing the lady said, "*Pouff!*"

At the fourth landing the gentleman stopped and produced a large white handkerchief with which he carefully wiped his forehead and the inside of his collar Both were now panting heavily For some minutes they stood facing each other, too exhausted to speak Then each asked the other a silent question, they nodded, and set to work again upon the climb

At the sixth landing was a single chair, with a perforated wooden seat The lady collapsed upon this, and fell to fanning herself with a small bag The gentleman silently leaned against the handrail, expanded his cheeks several times in quick succession, sniffed, and put a hand to his side For what seemed hours there was the sound of heavy breathing

"*Vous voulez passer, monsieur ?*" whispered the lady hoarsely of Gary

"No, no, that's all right," said Gary

She nodded and closed her eyes

From upstairs the noise of Russian music suddenly tinkled forth with the opening of a door, and was hushed again

"When one has been in the café all day," explained the gentleman, taking deep breaths, "one is not prepared for scaling mountains at night Phew! *Donc* Shall we continue, *chère ?*"

The lady nodded, fanning herself, and rose with difficulty to her feet

It was the last lap The door of the *atelier* opened to their knock, and in it the figure of Timmins appeared, correctly attired in black tie and tails, and with a noble display of British war medals on his chest He inclined his right ear deferentially

The gentleman panted into it

Mr Timmins gave a tug to his waistcoat and lifted up his voice "'Is 'Ighness the Grand Duke Constantine and Lady ' Good evening, Mr Williams, sir " His face creased into a donnish smile "'It's a pleasure indeed to see *you* 'ere, sir Might I ask your Christian name, Mr Williams ?'"

Gary told him

"*Mister-Gary-Williams* ! You'd better give me that Chamberlain, sir "

"What, this ? Oh, sure !" Gary handed over his umbrella

"The cloakroom's at the bottom of the stairs, sir Didn't they tell you, sir ? Oh, my goodness me ! Er—Your Grace "

"Eh ?"

"Your hat and coat, Your Grace ! And Her Grace's cloak !"

"*Ah ou !* Pup prrrm !" Shamefacedly the Grand Duke Constantine and his Duchess fluttered out of their outer garments and took up their positions in the queue of royal personages who were shuffling slowly round the room towards the point on the far side near the window, where Her Hereditary Highness Princess Stephanie of Monte Cristo, with His Hereditary Highness Prince Paul at her side, and the Grand Duchess Eulalie standing a little to the rear, were receiving the guests

"Whatever's come over that chap downstairs I don't know," muttered Mr Timmins "Just follow the others, sir '*Is Royal 'Ighness Prince Luis of the Astorias* !"

A young man with a pendulous lower lip and a haemophile look flopped into the room and took up his station behind Gary

"Luis, my boy!" said the Grand Duke Constantine, turning

"Greetings, O Uncle!" exclaimed Prince Luis, also in English "How's the fish and chips?"

"Oh, *comme ci comme ça*," the Grand Duke told him without enthusiasm, but without grumbling For *déjeuner* we had forty-five It could be worse It could be better "

"Y-a des *Americains*?" asked Prince Luis

"Un peu But they are not what they have been "

"They lose their appetites?"

"No," agreed the Grand Duke thoughtfully "I give to them bortsch—I give to them vodka—I shtoff them with pears *kornuloff* But it is not that But they have lost their fascination for things Russian "

The group moved forward a few paces

"Too much competition," said Prince Luis, nodding

"Ah, *vous avez raison*!" declared the Grand Duke energetically "There are too many of you damned ex-Royalty *Das ist Schrecklich*! After all, we have been first And now, where is Russia?" He clucked to himself, and then demanded "You are still in the motor business?"

"I have chucked it," said the Prince "*Moi, je suis snob*!"

"Oh?"

"Too many Cossack officers"

"My dear *garçon*! Why have you not tell me? I could attend to it"

"They have been respectful to me personally, but to dine in the mess every night *avec ces tartares* Ah non! *Je vous en prie*! I prefer the French *Je deteste contempler toujours le souvenir des steppes*!"

"So! And you do now what?" He put an arm through his wife's and propelled her a few paces

Prince Luis of the Astorias shrugged "I have tried the White Slaving," he said

"*C'est vrai ?*" exclaimed the Grand Duke, glancing nervously at his wife

"But nothing has come of it So now I am *parfumeur*"

"Ah!" said the Grand Duke "There is some future in that?"

Prince Luis made the face of fatalism "I am outside Charney's," he said "I squirt the passers-by Perhaps one day I shall make a marriage, or General Metaxas will win——"

"*On Espere !*" said the Grand Duke "Ah! *La petite Stephanie ! Et Paul ! Mes felicitations to you both ! And Cousin Eulalie !* How is the music, dear child?" He kissed the ladies on their finger-tips, and Paul on both cheeks

"One sings a little, Uncle Constantine," Stephanie said

"That's good, that's good," exclaimed the Grand Duke "Mind you keep her at it, Paul, after you're married It is great to have something in the sleeve in these days I do not know what I have done without my cooking Eulalie! You look thinner"

"It was my intention," said the Grand Duchess

Gary moved up and took the Princess Stephanie's hand He kissed it with rather more emotion than the etiquette of a Court function necessarily demanded The Princess Stephanie, in her white silk gown, with a broad red order across her breast, a large star in her waist, a diamond tiara on her hair, and the cross of St Anthony at her throat, glowed with a heightened colour

"You look terrific!" said Gary, in a rapt sort of way

"How do you do, young man?" said the Grand Duchess loudly and warningly, extending her hand

"My dear Grand Vizier," said Prince Paul stiffly "*Je suis enchanté*"

He shook hands with easy formality, and murmured in the middle of a little bow, "Drinks are in the bedder What d'you think of us, now you see us?"

"Tell you in the bedder," muttered Gary out of the corner of his mouth

He straightened correctly and moved towards the other room

"Good evening, Cousin Luis," came the voice of Stephanie

There was music in the other room but no dancing A bloused Russian band discoursed the music of the balalaika A pale young man, with his trousers tucked into his boots and duel gashes on his cheeks, pounded the piano at which Gary had once sung "ee" The heat was stifling The floor, cleared of its threadbare carpet, was packed, in nuclei of three or four, by the ex-crowned heads of Europe, their wives, their sons, their uncles, their nephews, their jewels, their orders, and their decorations The groups moved, disintegrated, coalesced A little nervous of the unaccustomed splendour, Gary kept a firm grip of his cuffs, and edged his way towards the piano It seemed a large and friendly instrument

"Twenty years ago," observed the pianist unexpectedly, "the people in these two rooms commanded the world And now look at the damned thing!" You're American, aren't you?"

"Sure," agreed Gary, his face breaking from the slight tension induced by his height, his tuxedo, and the company, into a smile at a friendly voice

"I thought so," said the pianist "You'll find the drinks in the bedroom" He nodded his head to a door at the end of the room, and plunged his hands into a cascade of notes

"Thanks," said Gary doubtfully, examining his feet at a great distance and fingering his tie "Seems a good idea at that" He began to make his way across the crowded floor, but was presently held up by the bare

back of a plump lady who discoursed fluently in French to a listening group

"Er—pardon me *Paidon me* "

"Eight hours," said the lady, bursting into English, "is too much For a man of sensitivity and artistic ability, to be sawing pieces of wood, and to be gluing pieces of wood, and to be making worm-holes, like the Archduke *Voyons ! C'est insupportable* "

"Excuse me," said Gary

An elderly man with a white imperial shrugged "When I have been a king," he said, "I have worked fourteen, sixteen, eighteen hours Often, when my affairs of state——"

"But at a desk !" declared the lady "At a desk it is different To be on one's feet !"

"Work," announced the gentleman with the white imperial, stiffly, "is, after all, always work "

"Yes," argued the lady impatiently "But it is relative To be at a desk, in a nice, comfortable palace—*oh, ma foi !* Sixteen hours of one is worth six hours of the other " She tapped the gentleman on the shoulder "I say because I know To be at a march past of the troops, *pouff*, it is easy But now I am *blanchisseuse* I stand at the tub It is not so amusing, that "

"Er—" said Gary, clearing his throat—"will you excuse me, please ?"

A short, thick-set gentleman, with three rows of medals, turned to the lady politely "How do you manage about your feet, Archduchess ?" he asked gravely

"Oho," said the lady, "I suffer ! I am in agonies ! It is torment ! To bath them often, it is the only thing "

"I myself have tried that, but it makes them tender "

"Ah no," declared the lady "The water must be quite, quite cold And Epsom salts "

"Ah, I have heard of this There is a colleague of mine, in the soft furnishing department "

Gary tapped delicately on the lady's back with his knuckle "Pardon me," he said

The lady scratched her back with her thumbnail

"May I pass, please ?" asked Gary, still trying, and breathing rather heavily through his nose

"Willy," said the lady to the man who had been a king, "is Her Hereditary Highness still receiving ? Don't you think you ought "

"Is it already time ?"

"I will see, Your Majesty," said the thick-set gentleman He took a few paces sideways, so as to be able to see through the dividing doors into the other room

"There are a few more yet, Your Majesty "

"We thank you," said His Majesty "We fancy we may receive it as a signal when His Hereditary Highness passes through to the bedroom "

"The bedroom ?" demanded the lady sharply "Why the bedroom ?"

"The alcoholic refreshments, Archduchess," explained the thick-set gentleman, "are in the bedroom "

The Archduchess hooted with mirth "Of course," she declared "How silly of me ! How silly I am, Willie ! How humorous you are !"

"I hate to bother you," said Gary succinctly in the lady's ear

"Oh, pardon !" she exclaimed, still laughing, and moving to one side She watched Gary pass "What is that ?" she enquired in a stentorian whisper "Is it the Press ?"

"It is the detective," replied His Majesty

At that moment Prince Paul emerged between the double doors, and sauntered, with his hands in his pockets, through the bedroom door Gary, who was by now within reach of the same haven, but had been hidden from the view of the Prince by a tall stooping gentleman whose dangling orders indicated the per-

pendicular, by swinging loose from the concavity of his chest, detected a sudden movement among the guests, and hesitated to see what was afoot

The King had detached himself from his little group and was advancing formally upon the other room. The rest of the guests fluttered forward a few paces with interest, like the members of a ballet. A moment later the King reappeared, looking very regal and avuncularly patronizing, with the Princess Stephanie on his arm. Immediately the guests who had eddied forward now eddied back, retreating in an enlarging semicircle before the pair. The orchestra, which had been playing unconcernedly, obligingly crashed into a waltz. The guests flattened themselves against the wall.

The King advanced about a third of the distance on to the floor, halted, dropped his arm and bowed. The Princess Stephanie curtsied, and then half raised her arms as an invitation, or as obedience to command. The King took her right hand and placed his own about her waist. After a few negligible false starts they picked up the time together and began twirling rapidly round.

Immediately the room seemed alive with gentlemen in a position of clicked heels and the half-bow which requests the pleasure of a lady. A moment later more couples detached themselves from the side and whirled, always at a respectful distance, from the royal pair.

Gary stood and watched the scene, watched Stephanie, almost hungrily at first, then with a growing sense of separation. He turned abruptly, and went through the bedroom door.

There was a bar arranged along one side of the room, and, on one side of it, a barman. On the other side the Prince stood with two gentlemen, one of whom Gary recognized as the elder of the two seconds who had assisted at his affair of honour. It was he who

observed Gary enter, and bowed with noticeably less formality than on the occasion of their previous encounter. It was indeed scarcely more than an inclination of the head. The Prince and the other man turned.

"Mind if I join you, gentlemen?" Gary asked.

"My friend," said the Prince, "we will have some whisky. The Grand Duke Nicholas, you know. Allow me to present my Grand Vizier—Prince Kropotkin."

"I'm very glad to know you," Gary said, and, to the barman, "Mine's a double."

"As I was saying," the Prince continued earnestly, "there should be a law. To travel at less than eighty kilos is to occupy space on the road which belongs to the community."

"But it is necessary," argued the Grand Duke Nicholas. "*All day* I am outside Claridges. I see with the eye of a stationary observer. If the traffic is to flow at eighty kilos, how are my clients to set down?"

"They can set down at the back," said the Prince curtly. "They have no business to be set down in what is intended to be an artery. *Encore un, s'il vous plaît*." He pushed aside his glass.

"There should be bays," urged Prince Kropotkin ardently. "If I have a fare that I wish to set down at Claridges I do my eighty with the rest, but I take the right-hand station. *N'est-ce-pas?* When I see Claridges I swing out into the bay."

"At eighty?" said the Grand Duke Nicholas scornfully. "Oho, I should not be long for this world."

"You said it," interjected Gary with some feeling.

The Grand Duke bowed.

"Thank you, monsieur."

"That's all right," Gary said, finely.

The Prince tossed down his whisky and banged the glass furiously on the counter. "At eighty," he declared, "I can stop dead in six metres."

"Ah *no* !" said Prince Kropotkin

"Dead, possibly," remarked the Grand Duke Nicholas
las "But not alive "

"*In six metres* !" reiterated the Prince, banging
with his fist "*Donnez moi du whisky, please* "

Gary cleared his throat

"Changing the subject for a moment," said Gary
"What's the custom around these parts ?"

"Custom ?" repeated Prince Kropotkin

"Yeah Can I just walk up to any girl in the room
and ask for a dance ? Or do I get thrown out on my
ear ?"

"The Grand Vizier of Monte Cristo," said Prince
Paul, "may dance with anyone in the room "

"Swell," said Gary "Do I just click heels ?"

"And bow," said Prince Kropotkin

"From the waist," said the Grand Duke Nicholas

"From the waist ? Half these guys haven't got
any waists "

"It can be indicated," said Prince Paul, "where
the waist would be if one had a waist " He drank his
whisky at a gulp "I will show you " He put his
glass down and walked away a few paces, then turned,
saw Gary with a start of pleasurable surprise, stared at
him intimately for a few seconds through his monocle,
advanced upon him with a swagger, stopped short,
banged his heels together, presented a view of his
extraordinarily neat parting, straightened himself,
and held up his arms

"It is very simple," said the Prince "But it is very
foolish " He accepted a fresh glass from the barman
"I have long ago decided that dancing was invented
by the Anglo-Saxons For us Latins it is not
enough "

"Maybe not," said Gary "I'm one of these knightly
guys Care to see me go to work ?"

"I am one of these twice-nightly guys I should
prefer some more whisky," said the Prince

"O K," said Gary genially, and turned, buttoning his coat

Gary's face, as the Prince had last seen it, was alight with easy confidence. As he came into the dancing-room, however, a look of desperate determination spread across his features, and he surveyed the scene with one eyebrow a little higher than the other, which was a trick of his. The waltz was still in progress, and Stephanie and the King were still rotating with expressions of dutiful distaste and paternal condescension respectively, while the remaining couples hovered, rather than danced, with elaborate self-effacement, on the confines of the floor.

Gary licked his lips and fixed the royal couple with the air of an athlete estimating the distance of his objective. He licked his lips again, buttoned his coat more tightly, and then advanced boldly across the floor and tapped the King smartly on his shoulder.

"Mind if I cut in?" he asked.

The King stood rooted to the spot.

The other dancers obediently stopped in unison.

The music ceased in mid-bar.

"What is this? What is this?" demanded the King over his shoulder. "I do not know what he means. There is some message for me?"

Gary had not been expecting anything quite like this. Out of the corners of his eyes he was aware that the guests were crowding in a circle, but he clicked his heels at Stephanie and bowed low, and blushed crimson.

"Well?" demanded the King sharply. "Well? What is it?"

Stephanie's lips were quivering.

"I was—er—I was trying to cut in," explained Gary, with a quaver in his voice, and added, "Your Majesty."

"Cut in? What is this?"

Gary glanced nervously from side to side with a troubled face. "Don't they have cutting-in here?" he mumbled. "Gee, Your Majesty, I'm terribly sorry!"

"The fellow is drunk," said the King, dismissing the matter "Come, my dear " He took hold of Stephanie again, and instantly the music recommenced

Gary rapped the King on the shoulder again, more smartly this time "*Just* a minute!" he said angrily "Just a *minute*!"

The King stopped

The music stopped

"Go away," said the King "We are becoming annoyed"

"I'm sorry, King," said Gary firmly "But one of us has got to walk off this floor looking like a fool, and it isn't going to be me"

The King stamped "*Will somebody take this lunatic and throw him into the Seine ?*"

Gary was dimly aware of an answering commotion of male voices, but his blood was up He stood his ground

"Not so fast!" he said "Now listen In America, where I come from——"

The King exploded in a foreign tongue

Stephanie put a hand on his arm "Your Majesty——"

"*Either,*" said the King, "*you leave this floor within two seconds, or we do ourselves*"

"That's it," said Gary "You've got the idea"

"Your Majesty" Stephanie began speaking in German, very soothingly The King listened He answered gruffly, also in German Stephanie spoke again, this time with an air of pleading The King stood stiffly, bending slightly forward, inclining one ear Gary stood waiting, fiddling with his buttons, looking at once uneasy, properly servile, and full of a mulish obstinacy There was the accent of the conspirator, now, in Stephanie's speech, and the King was fingering his beard She stopped on a note of anxiety There was a little pause while the King thought to himself Then he nodded and turned a curiously

chameleon-like eye on Gary. Abruptly he turned his back, clicked heels, bowed from the waist, and stood upright. A young lady curtsied and fluttered into his embrace.

The music started. Stephanie held up her arms to Gary.

"Gee, Steph," he whispered, quick to take advantage of the offer. "What did you say to him?"

"You must hold you right arm down at your side."

"What, *my* right arm?"

"You are not supposed to take me in your arms."

"Oh." He dropped his arm. "What, like this? But I can't dance this way."

"That is all the dancing you are allowed with a Hereditary Princess. I told him——"

"Yes?"

"I told him you were out to smash the revolution, and that it was a matter of the most urgent policy for Monte Cristo that I must never allow you to provoke a rupture."

"You did?" Gary stopped abruptly.

She smiled. "It is necessary to invent *some* kind of story. Is anything the matter?"

He wagged his head. "Not a thing. That's a darned intoxicating scent you're wearing."

"You like it?"

"Frankly, I'm feeling pretty drunk with the beauty of it all."

She laughed.

They danced for a little while in silence.

"Well," said Gary, "since you can't provoke any open ruptures." He put his arm round her waist.

"When in Paris," she said, smiling, "'do as the Americans', etcetera?"

"Stephanie, my dear," he answered, "I believe you've got something there!" He put his cheek against hers. He felt her eyelids flutter. For a moment it almost

unmanned him "You dance pretty well for a princess," he said

He felt the little breath of a smile come through her nose "Do I?" she whispered

"Come on, let's dance," he whispered back

They danced, giving themselves to the music He inhaled the fragrance of her He held her body close to his, and felt her suppleness become part of him They danced as one Through lowered lids he allowed his eyes to wander among the little curls which caressed her neck, at the outline of one white shoulder pressed against his breast And he knew then what he had hoped in his heart On a sudden impulse he propelled her gently towards one of the tall french windows, opened it with the hand behind her back, and, without breaking the spell, danced her gently on to the balcony, closed the window behind him, and kissed her ear

"Stephanie dear," he whispered, with the words tumbling out, "making all due deference to understatement, the fact of the matter is I'm in love with you And what's more, my dear——"

Her answer was to cling to him more tightly

Her head was turned away He began kissing those little curls, going softly down the line of her neck He felt her face turn suddenly towards him, felt her lips on his They stayed like that for what seemed many minutes, while the music came faintly through the window and a taxi passed in the street

"Stephanie," he said, with a break in his voice, "I've fallen in love with a princess And I rather suspect—that the princess——"

"Has fallen in love with Mrs Williams' little boy Gary? Shall I tell you something?"

He studied her face in the darkness

"Yes, please"

She looked at him steadily

"I love you"

He sighed

"Gosh!" said Gary "This is pretty magic" He wagged his head "This," said Gary, "is one of those moments of moments What shall we do about it?"

"This, for the moment," she answered, feeling for his lips

For that moment, it seemed to him, the world stood still

"My darling kid," he said, "I worship you! I adore you! I take this seriously I feel pretty religious about it Such as I am, I'm yours I love you with all that is in me I told you it was going to be hell for somebody *When do we get married?*"

He watched her look suddenly out over the empty street

"I can't," she said

"Oh yes you can"

"I can't," she repeated with a touch of emotion in her voice "I can't"

He caught his breath He stared He tried to see her face

"Say," he exclaimed, "you sound as though you meant that!"

"I do," she said

He shook her almost roughly "Hey, wait a minute! This conversation's taken the wrong turning! Hey, Stephanie! Snap out of it!"

"I can't," she repeated "I tell you I *can't marry you!*"

"But, my *God!*" said Gary "If I love you and you love me"

She did not answer

"*Stephanie!*" He raised his voice desperately as if trying to recall something from the dead "Stephanie! Come back!" She was still in his arms, but there was a queer lifelessness in her "Stephanie, I love you! Do you hear? And you love me! You know you do! You *said* so! *Stephanie! Answer!*"

"I do," she said

He whistled

"That's better Gosh ! For a moment I thought—
Stephanie ! Are you listening ? In my country, when
two people love each other, they get married "

"Not in mine," she said

"God darn it," he said, "what's got wrong with the
thing ?"

She looked up in his face with a queer solemnity

"My lover," she said quietly, "I cannot marry you
I cannot marry you because my first duty is not to
myself It is to my country and to my people "

He hesitated, and then broke out

"All that's musical-comedy stuff !" he declared
excitedly, waving his arms at the window "It's
Ruritania ! It's make-believe ! It's all *over* ! Steph-
anie, you can't let that nonsense come between——"

"My first duty," she repeated, "is to my people They
depend on me "

He shouted "What for ?"

She shrugged "To save them "

"What from ?"

"From the Republic From mis-rule From
exploitation "

"Hell !" said Gary rudely "Hell ! Once again,
hell ! And damnation ! This is fantastic "

She began to explain

"I am the rightful Princess of Monte Cristo It is not
my choice It simply *is* so For a thousand years my
family have been the rulers of these people You do
not know, perhaps, my Gary, that that is a thing which
cannot be destroyed It cannot be put on one side for
little reasons, because Monsieur So-and-so wishes to
make a bathing beach, or because Signor So-and-so has
read a little Karl Marx and wishes to experiment with a
republic, or because the Hereditary Princess wishes to
marry an American "

"But it *is* on one side," he insisted desperately

"These wretched people of yours They pushed *you* on one side all right, didn't they?"

"I have pardoned them," she said "They did not understand"

"I don't blame 'em," he declared angrily "It sounds to me like the most senseless nonsense I ever heard My God, Stephanie, you can't really *believe*"

"It would make it easier for me if you would try to understand"

"I *can't* understand," he said "It's medieval It's a fairy-tale It's like suddenly being asked to understand Cinderella, or Mother Goose What are you going to *do*?"

"I am going to marry my cousin Paul"

"Marry a man you don't love! I see And then what?"

"Raise the flag of revolt"

"A real revolution?"

"Quite real"

He paused

"Bloodshed?"

"I do not like that part either"

He released her and tore his hair "It's crazy!" he cried "God help us, it's bughouse! I never heard such a thing! Is this twentieth-century Paris, or the Arabian Nights, or what?"

"We are in Paris," she said calmly

He strode suddenly up the little balcony and turned to face her excitedly, with both palms uppermost "But you can't have a revolution without some organization! There's got to be *arms*! There's got to be *propaganda*! There's got to be some sort of a *signal*! A sign from Heaven! They'll just fine you forty-five francs Without an organization——"

"It exists," she said

He stared at her

"It has all been thought out It has been cared for

For years there has been a loyalist party For years the organization has been intact For years they have kept their arms For years they have met and talked about it in safe places They have held their elections There is a cabinet which meets each week in the underground passage There is a sign by which the loyalists know one another It is three knocks—a long and two short I tell you this, because I wish that you should believe in me If you are in Monte Cristo, and know it, you will hear that sign wherever you go You will hear the croupier put down his rake, so, at the table You will hear a man tap with his feet so, idly, as he stands on the *terrasses*, looking out to sea You will hear the cabmen do it to their horses You will hear the soldiers do it with their rifles on the ground You will hear the policemen do it with their whistles I tell you, the army is ours ! The police is ours ! The people are ours ! And when the time comes——”

“Go on, go on,” he said hopelessly “I’m nuts already I may as well hear the rest”

“When we are married,” she continued, “and our claim can no longer be disputed, the word will be given to watch for the signal Paul and I will embark on the royal yacht at Cannes, we shall steam to Monte Cristo We shall enter the harbour at eleven o’clock The old royal flag will then be hoisted, with the salute of twenty-one guns *Then*,” she said, “the people will rise That night we shall sleep in the palace”

He surveyed her with his hands in his pockets She stood up very straight with her head thrown back, looking queerly unattainable He nodded

“Just where do you and I come in ?”

Suddenly she broke down The transition was so abrupt that for a moment it left him stupefied She turned her head sideways, her lips trembled, and in an instant she was sobbing into her hands

He leapt to her “Stephanie !” he whispered “Stephanie, for God’s sake don’t ! Hey, Stephanie !

My God, what's come between us ? Here's your old Gary Put your head here I'm one of these deep-chested guys Stop it, honey Stephanie ! Sh !"

She cried on his chest while he fondled her hair and stared out over her at the chumney-pots of Paris He was wise enough to say no more What could he say ? He stared up with a troubled face His thumb explored her ear He experienced a sense of departure, as if there were a few more precious minutes, and then the end From far away the clocks of Paris disagreed, melancholily, about the hour of one

"You're cold," he said

She shook her head

He had an instinct to carry her somewhere To pick her up and step over obstacles To carry her for miles, and set her down gently in some chosen place He looked about him with this idea in his head, but they were on a balcony

"Stephanie, is this final ?"

She nodded, and clung to the lapels of his coat

Within him something died

"We must go in," he said "We can't stay here "

She nodded

"Can you face it ? Can you face the room ?"

She nodded

Very gently he detached the little bag she carried, opened it, and found a mirror

"I'll hold it," he said

Suddenly she flung her arms passionately round him They kissed

"Good-bye, *mon* Gary "

"Good-bye *nothing* !" he replied forcefully "This is where I begin "

"It is good-bye," she repeated

For answer, he released her and stood up with a gesture of finality She moved the mirror in his hand to the right angle, and attended to her face

When he thought she had done "Ready?" he asked

He popped the mirror back in the bag and gave it to her. Then he began very gently to open the window of the room. The noise of the music grew louder. When the gap was wide enough he put his head through. He beckoned. She came up to him, and he put an arm round her in the position of the dance. They slipped in quietly in time to the music and danced from the shadows into the bright light, unobserved. Unobserved?

"A-ha!" came the voice of Prince Paul loudly, triumphantly, accusingly.

Prince Paul, with the greatest possible elegance, but nevertheless in a condition of advanced intoxication, was coming towards them, waving his long cigarette-holder and eying them with humorous malevolence through the glass in one eye.

"Let's get out of here," muttered Gary, dancing in the other direction.

"So!" exclaimed Prince Paul. "You run away from me, eh? But it's no use. I say it's *sno use*! I saw you on the balcony, my Grand Vizier and my betro—betro—fiancée." He followed them round boisterously, unsteadily, as they danced. "You arrange the *petite morganaïque*, eh? That is very cosy."

"Paul! Go away!"

"Oho! *Je m'occupe de ça!* The Hererirary Princess and the Grand Vizier! *C'est gentil, n'est-ce pas?* The Grand Vizier is a *spy*! He told me so hi'self. Is *sall* right, my dear—you needn't look startled. Is *sall* done for money. What these Americans will do for money is *alabsoluly* amazing."

"Paul!"

"*Shut up, will you?*" Gary said.

"Of course. You didn't *know*!" Prince Paul continued. "He's being paid by ol' Reynaud! Isn't it wonderful? Thousands an' thousands of pounds, from the treasury of Monte Cristo. Thousands'n thousands'n

thous—of pounds, to fall in love with *you*, stop you marrying *me*, and make a *beautiful* mess of the revolu——,”

Gary's fist shot out. It made abrupt and painful contact with the teeth of the Prince's mouth. It sent His Hereditary Highness rocketing backwards in a ridiculous arc, to hit the floor with a resounding thud which startled the orchestra and brought the other guests rushing in a horrified stampede. He lay there very still. The orchestra stumbled into discordant silence.

The Princess Stephanie faced Gary with a dead-white face.

Gary hung his head and examined his broken knuckles.

“You can deny this?” she asked.

“Well, no,” said Gary, “and on the other hand, yes. You see——” he stopped with sudden hopelessness. “Yeah,” he admitted. “True enough.”

“I think,” said Stephanie, “that you had better go.”

“Yeah,” agreed Gary slowly. “I guess I better had. I'm sorry I had to bust the Prince. The episode seems about closed, anyway. Well.” He nodded generally to the assembly. “Good night, folks. Sleep tight! Wake sober!”

He strode out through a lane which formed for him

Timmins was at the door.

“I'm extremely sorry, Mr. Williams, sir. If there is anything——”

“That's all right,” said Gary, running down the stairs. “G'night.”

PART FIVE

CHAPTER T IRTEEN

THE NEXT MORNING, AT SEVEN HOURS THIRTY OF THE clock precisely, a tall figure, with a rather shapeless hat and a very thick overcoat, might have been observed making his way along the Rue de la Boétie, furtively carrying a longish brown-paper parcel

The Rue la Boétie wakes early Already the shutters were coming down from the shop windows Stout ladies were staggering about with pails of soapy water Café proprietors, with enormous arms, were venting their early-morning tempers on terrified youths who were arriving by bicycle with yard-long bundles of bread, and the pavements clattered with the high heels of the midinettes tripping bareheaded to work

The loose-limbed one arrived outside the two tall doors which separated No 14bis from the outside world, gazed up at them, whistled innocently, scratched his jaw, and turned to cast a reflective eye upon the pavement Having surveyed the terrain to his satisfaction, he pulled the parcel from under his arm and began to struggle with the knots in the string They defied him Still whistling angelically, he searched in his pockets for a knife He had no knife He struggled with the string again, trying to tear it off, but it was that thick, French, rope-like stuff, and the young lady in the shop had done her best with it

He looked about him

A few doors further up the road there was a café Gary approached it purposefully and planked down a copper coin loudly on the counter

"Matches," he said

"*Des allumettes, monsieur ?*"

"You heard me "

The matches were planked like the penny on the counter

"Thanks," Gary said

He whistled again and made his way, with noticeable unostentation, back to his pitch. Then he struck a match and carefully set light to the string in various strategic places. He burnt his fingers and swore. The string popped apart here and there, and he tore off a great quantity of paper and corrugated cardboard to disclose one of those artists' three-legged stools which collapse into a single pillar if the three-cornered seat of canvas is not stretched to hold them in their place.

The mechanics of the thing puzzled him for a while and he pinched his finger in it, but by studying the diagrams carefully in a page of printed directions he finally erected it to his satisfaction and stood it up before the doors. He screwed the paper and string into a ball and looked about him for somewhere to dispose of it. A street cleaner passed at that moment with a little metal cart.

"*Pardon !*" said Gary, tossing it to him.

He caught it deftly and thrust it into a hatch in his cart without altering his expression or uttering a word.

Gary sat down on the stool.

The next thing that happened was that the concierge came and opened the two big doors. He glanced at Gary without much interest.

"*Bonjour, monsieur*"

Gary saluted him by exploding a handful of fingers at his right temple. Then he took out a paper packet of Camels, jerked one out by flicking the packet against his knee, lit it and settled down to wait.

There were other people who stopped for a moment to take a passing interest in Gary. There was, for example, the proprietor of the café from whom he had bought the matches, who thrust his head through the doorway once or twice and eventually stood on the pavement for a minute or so, with his fists on his hips, in solid immobility, before he expectorated neatly

through a grating and retired within Gary took no notice of him

There was also an errand-boy on a bicycle, who came up whistling, sat propped for a little while with one foot against the kerbstone, took in the details of the scene with careful attention, and, when he had had his fill of it, rode away whistling

Then there came two nuns with floppy white hats who whispered together furtively before they hastened away with that curious rotatory movement of the feet evinced alike by nuns and the advertisement figure of the Old Dutch Cleanser

Presently the workers began to arrive at the doorway They were mostly black-coated young men with glasses, pale faces and preoccupied expressions, who hurried up with clean white handkerchiefs and brief-cases Some of them threw him an unnoticing glance, others not Three of them, at different times, when they had gone rapidly in through the doorway, came back at leisure for a further look They explored all the possibilities of the situation, did a few quick sums in mental arithmetic, and returned sorrowfully to work There were also some girls Some of them were pretty girls All of them were neat They arrived mostly in couples, tossing their curls in the morning air, and were more exercised, it seemed, with the sexual possibilities of the sudden encounter than with curiosity as to its cause Most of them stood arm in arm for a moment in pairs and laughed Some of them gave him a "*Bonjour, monsieur!*" These, also, he saluted with a handful of fingers

Shortly after nine o'clock the racket of the typewriters was in full cry The workers were in the hive Then the first-comers of the leisurely ones began to put in their appearance An occasional limousine sidled down the street A lady in fur stopped at the shop windows, examined them, stopped at Gary, examined him, continued to the next shop window and examined that

The café proprietor had also favoured him with a further inspection, this time lasting a full ten minutes

At about nine-fifteen the concierge, who had been quietly wielding a broom behind him, came and dusted absent-mindedly beneath his feet. Then he stood for some time watching Gary and pushing his beret on one side to scratch his head

"*Monsieur desire quelque chose ?*" he enquired at last

"*Oui,*" said Gary, speaking with calculated and elaborate distinctness "*Je de-sire Mademoiselle Dubois !*"

The man's face lit up

"*Ah,*" said he, delighted at the thought "*Vous desirez mademoiselle Aha ! Oho ! Aha ! Tout est comprend ! Tout est pardonné ! Oh, ho, ho, ho !*"

He went away, grumbling with succulent laughter in his chest, and wagging his head

A few minutes later he came back, with his wife, to display the phenomenon

"*Il est impassioné avec Mademoiselle Dubois,*" he explained

"*C'est vrai ?*" she exclaimed, nodding her head, and hugging her stomach in a motherly way "*C'est un roman, n'est-ce-pas ?*"

"*Ah oui ! C'est un roman !*"

For a long time they surveyed him, nodding their heads, and then, chuckling to each other, they withdrew, and could be heard for the next half-hour arguing very rapidly and happily in the office

Thereafter the good concierge and his good lady took a proprietary interest in Gary and his affairs. At eleven o'clock it was madame who came out, to re-assure herself that he was still at his post, to smile at him in a happy, motherly way, and to inform an *agent de police*, two chauffeurs, three small girls, and an artist with a beard "*Il est enamouré de Mademoiselle Dubois*"

"*Ah !*" they exclaimed, severally and individually, nodding and repeating the information to one another

in case they should not have heard "*Il est enamouré de Mademoiselle Dubois*!"

The intelligence spread as the little group of watchers disintegrated and was re-formed by the addition of several newcomers. The word was passed along from mouth to mouth. It was elaborated, commented upon, argued about, and treated with immense respect and sympathy. "*Il est enamouré*," said they, nodding their heads and shifting to obtain a better view, and at length departing, with a quick whisper to any fresh arrival who displayed a tendency to join the group, "*Il est enamouré de Mademoiselle Dubois*." The citizens of the Rue de la Boétie understood.

At half past one it was the good concierge who put in a grinning appearance and sheepishly produced a paper bag.

"Monsieur's *grand passion* has not rendered him devoid of appetite?"

"Say! That's darned nice of you!" declared Gary, falling to with relish on the sour bread and *saucisson de Lyon*.

Since it was, by now, the lunch interval, a rather larger crowd found the leisure to take an interest in the proceedings. There were three young ladies in neatly cut coats and skirts, four postmen, an assortment of small boys, a distinguished elderly gentleman with the Legion of Honour, and several of the inhabitants of the building who congregated in the porch and daintily consumed such repasts as they had brought with them, in attaché-cases, for company.

At a quarter to two a large open car, driven by a gentleman with a blue chin, a monocle, and three fashionably dressed ladies of vaguely immoral appearance, parked itself securely by the kerb and remained there while its occupants smoked gold-tipped cigarettes. A few minutes later the café proprietor up the road made a brilliant and strategic rearrangement of his tables with such scuffling and begging of pardons and dropping of napkins, whereby his clients were enabled

to obtain a more satisfactory view without the necessity of twisting their necks

At one-fifty a vendor of smutty postcards, sensing, as he thought, a sympathetic market for his wares, succeeded in reducing the numbers of the group considerably After a violent altercation with the gentleman with the Legion of Honour, however, he departed, greasily crestfallen, and, his influence removed, the crowd soon regained satisfactory proportions

At two o'clock precisely, that same small boy with the beret, the short socks, and the initials B F, who had sung arpeggios on the day of Gary's first music lesson, butted his way through the encircling ranks and presented himself with feet akimbo

"*Qu'est-ce-que tu fais là ?*" he demanded rudely

The situation was made clear to the child by a dozen eager members of his immediate *entourage* "He dies of love for Mademoiselle Dubois ! Ah, what patience ! What passion ! What humility ! See how he suffers *Le pauvre amant* "

"Better beat it, sonny," Gary said "I don't understand the lingo, but it doesn't sound suitable for little boys Now beat it, will you, before I push your nasty little face in !"

"*Qu'est-ce-qu'il dit ? Qu'est-ce-qu'il dit ?*" whispered the crowd to one another

"And that goes for the whole bunch !" said Gary angrily "Scram, will you ? Before I have to read the Riot Act "

But nobody beat it except the small boy, who went in to his arpeggios

On the contrary, the crowd of watchers rapidly increased It had now reached a size which was, of itself, an attraction It spread out into the roadway so that the big green buses, with their round boiler fronts, were forced to crawl past its extremities, while the human flies on their tailboards craned and shouted the inevitable question

"*Qu'est-ce-qu'il arrive ?*"

"*Il est enamouré de Mademoiselle Dubois*"

At a quarter past two the Grand Duchess Eulalie, informed evidently of what was going on by the small boy in socks, arrived in her most frigid mood and demanded "*Monsieur ! What is this ?*"

"Bodyguard, sister," said Gary laconically

"Bodyguard ?"

"Yep," said Gary "Protection "

"Against what ?" asked the Grand Duchess

"Palace Hotel," said Gary, "and the Société de whatsit "

"That is *too* gangster," answered the Grand Duchess

"It is ridiculous "

"Have it your own way, sister, but here I am and here I stay "

"If you do not go immediately I shall inform the police "

"O K , go ahead Inform everybody you want "

"I shall do so immediately," said the Grand Duchess, retreating with hauteur, while the crowd made way for her

The crowd buzzed with excitement

"It is the mother !" they assured one another "It is the mother of his adored ! It is *Madame Dubois* ! Ah, *quel type* ! She has turned and re-entered with *hauteur* It is not convenient, that *Mon Dieu*, but it is not sympathetic ! See how he tortures himself with emotion ! He is impassioned ! He is erotic ! What sufferings ! What agony ! It is pretty to watch She should take some notice of that "

At half past two a thrusting young man with a tiny waist and a furry green hat created a sudden disturbance He arrived in a taxi and immediately set to work to employ French Rugby Union tactics on the multitude With infectious excitement, and dark eyes burning in a pale face, he swam brutally through the human sea with a frenzied overhand stroke which

inflicted severe damage and left a fury of vociferous recrimination in his wake

"*Où ! Là !*" shouted the angry voices, and fists were raised "*Assassin ! Fiche toi la peine !*"

The young man heeded not at all With invincible determination he breasted the crowd He drew closer Hats were flying Ladies with parcels produced startling effects of explosion, as if they were bombs He was quite close now His breath was coming in short gasps His green hat was shapeless There was blood behind one of his ears, but his eyes still burned with that consuming flame He landed in front of Gary and whipped a notebook and pencil out of his pocket

"*Je suis la presse, monsieur,*" he panted "*Avez-vous quelque chose à déclarer ?*"

"Nice work, partner Say, what did *you* do in the Great War ?"

The young man scribbled furiously

"*On dit que vous désirez une jeune fille, monsieur ?*"

Gary regarded him with disapproval

"Doesn't anyone speak United States around here ?"

"No spik," answered the young man, scribbling rapidly "*Mais je comprends un peu*"

"Comprenny, eh ?"

"*Vous désirez effectuer un liaison simple, monsieur ? Ou vous contemplez le mariage ?*"

"Yeah ! I got you that time," said Gary, screwing his face with the effort of comprehension "Sure, I contemplate *mariage !*"

"*Ah !*" said the young man, covering sheets in some sort of shorthand

"Have you got that straight ? I'm one of these old-fashioned guys, understand ?"

"*Où, où, où !*" exclaimed the reporter, scribbling "*Mariage ! Tout confort !*"

The young man was only the first of his species There came another, and another, and another, battling through the crowd By three o'clock Gary was

surrounded by fifteen of them, all in pointed shoes, all with pointed noses, all scribbling madly on their writing-blocks

By three-fifteen the first flashlight began to flicker against the gloomy afternoon

By three-thirty a perfect battery of cameras focused their evil eyes upon him in a malevolent semicircle, photographing him from this angle, from that angle, and even from above, where some pioneer spirit had attained access to a balcony by means of a ladder

By a quarter to four the first edition of the news was being cried upon the streets. The shrill voices of the newsboys came floating from afar. "*Sensation passionnelle ! Sensation passionnelle ! Paris-Soir !* Sit-down strike of a lover *Paris-Soir ! Sensation passionnelle !*"

At a few minutes after four the crowd stretched for two-thirds of the way across the road, and the traffic was piled up in confusion on either side as far as the eye could reach

At five minutes past the hour came the first talkie van, a vast affair, with two men cranking methodically upon its roof

A few minutes later there were two

A few minutes later there were no less than four

The fortune of the café proprietor was already made. Enterprising men on the opposite side of the street were crying window accommodation at ten francs a half-hour

A horde of ferocious police, in capes, arrived to take charge of the situation, but on having the matter explained to them broke into smiles of understanding and forgiveness and contented themselves with the helpful task of assisting the traffic to filter through small spaces left in the roadway by the simple expedient of blowing shrill blasts on their whistles and menacing the drivers with their batons

At half past four precisely, anyone who hovered at the periphery of attention might have noticed a sudden

electrical increase of tension, a pressing forward, a surging, a low, long-drawn, exclamatory "*Ah*!" In the distance, near the two tall doors, the sporadic illumination of the flashlights was suddenly quickened in tempo so that it became almost one continuous dancing glare. The crowd strained and moaned with vicarious emotion. "*Elle est là !*" they cried. "*C'est elle ! Ah, comme elle est ravissante ! Ah, comme elle est belle ! Elle est charmante ! La belle Mademoiselle Dubois*."

Somewhere a woman fainted. Somewhere a bell rang in agitation. Somewhere an ambulance dashed up. The silhouetted figures danced on top of the talkie cars and wound excitedly. Men crouched with headphones on their ears. Then, led by one rare spirit with an appreciation of the emotional application of the higher frequencies, the chorus of motor-horns began.

"*Peep, peep, peep, peep, peep!*" cried the voice of the leader, with both hands pressed in the centre of the wheel.

"*Peep ! Peeeeeeep !*" answered the others, enthusiastically taking up the cry.

The cacophony was deafening, indescribable.

"You are making me ridiculous!" Stephanie shouted above the din.

"Not half so ridiculous," he shouted back, "as I'm making myself. Say, what's the matter with these darned Parisians, anyway? Can't a guy give his best girl protection without half the city turning up to take snaps? Aren't they used to gang warfare around here?"

She laughed scornfully, shrilly audible.

"Gang warfare!"

"Sure. It's war! That guy Reynaud means business."

She stared at him, disbelieving.

"You are serious?"

"I was never more serious in my life," he declared.

She laughed again.

"You are too absurd!"

"Say! Listen!" He put his hands to his mouth
"This guy Reynaud's pretty desperate"

"He must be," she agreed "He employed you"

"He certainly did"

"For which he cannot be forgiven"

"That's all right," he yelled "Maybe I deserve it
But when that guy threatens to bump my Stephanie off
I'm going to stay here and see that he doesn't, see? I
don't care whether you feel ridiculous or not So
long as you stay inside that's all right with me Do I
care if I make a traffic block that stops him from getting
within a mile of the place? No fear!" He paused,
coughing "Gosh, I'm becoming one of these eloquent
guys"

She put her hands on her hips in an attitude of
derision

"Bump off?" She laughed "How are they to
bump me off in the Rue de la Boétie?"

He put a hand to one ear

"This is Paris, *mon cher*"

"Why, so it is!" he exclaimed in pretended astonish-
ment "Gee, I thought it was Ruritania"

"Will you please go?" she demanded angrily

He crossed his legs the other way

"I'll go," he bawled at her, "when I have your defin-
ite verbal undertaking not to walk out of these doors
without ringing me first Wherever you go, I'm
coming with you"

"I think," she said, "that you are talking nonsense"

"Yeah? Well, I'm doing the thinking around here Do
I get the undertaking, or do I contact the undertaker?"

She stamped her foot

"You will do as I tell you," she ordered "You
will please go In a moment I shall become passionate"

"It's all right with me," he assured her "I can be
passionate too Ask anybody Ask these people"
He waved a hand "Aren't I one of these passionate
guys? Don't you read the papers? Haven't you

seen tonight's *Paris-Soir* ? Haven't you found time to get around to the movies lately ?"

Six flashlights went off at once

"Now get this, honey I'm afraid I must forbid you to leave this place alone "

She tapped with her foot threateningly on the pavement

"You *forbid* me ?"

"I certainly do," shouted Gary, and lit a Camel

She sighed

"*Eh bien !*"

She turned on her heel and walked straight through the crowd

The crowd seemed to expect Gary to do something He did it He flung his cigarette to the pavement, stamping it out with his heel as he rose Then he strode after her through the narrow passage in the ranks, which was expectantly held open for him As he passed grimly through there was a burst of hand-clapping from the ladies, and the gentlemen respectfully removed their hats

The thing became an absurd travesty of the Pied Piper On went Stephanie, marching with head erect, round the corner by Felix Potin, and down the Boulevard Malesherbes Then Gary, pounding purposefully behind, about twenty paces in the rear, and glancing grimly from side to side Then a mighty concourse, headed by dodging and genuflecting photographers, stiffened by the cumbrous, elephantine amble of the talkie vans, and tailed by several thousand excited, chattering, vivacious and enthusiastic people

Two hundred paces down the Boulevard Malesherbes there is, on the right-hand side, a narrow turning which loses itself in a maze of amorphous back-premises, a tangle of garages, unsuspected restaurants, and the service entrances to this, that and the other enterprise of the Rue de la Boétie With some thought, perhaps, of dodging down a place too narrow for those lumbering

vans to follow, Stephanie turned down this and broke into a run

Gary ran too

The photographers ran too, dancing like the members of a fantastic ballet in their endeavours to obtain at least some aspect of their quarries' faces Down the narrow passage the whole crowd poured

Stephanie ran faster

His arms bent smartly at the elbows, Gary trundled in pursuit

She dodged this way She twisted that

After her dodged and twisted Gary and the better-conditioned of their pursuers Down tortuous streets they went, up alleyways, down passages, under arches, in and out of courtyards, helter-skelter, racing, pounding, doubling back, and so, abruptly, into the Rue de la Boétie

It was foolish of Stephanie to turn once again into the Rue de la Boétie, or perhaps it was simply thoughtless, or yet again, defiant The thing happened in a flash She ran round the corner with her head turned, to throw a tempestuous glance at her harriers Perhaps she shouted something, because her mouth was open Running like this she missed the pavement, tripped, recovered her balance, and stood in the roadway, furiously facing Gary, at the precise moment at which a large American saloon with white-walled tyres suddenly caught sight of her and accelerated with hair-raising efficiency and obviously murderous intent

Gary's acceleration beat that of the car

"Look *out*!" he yelled

He dived for her, caught her with the full force of his momentum round her waist There was a scream of tyres, a rush of wind, two unshaven faces in a back window—and two people clutching each other in the roadway while traffic streamed on either side

"See what I mean?" asked Gary quietly His face was very white

She fled from him without a word

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

AS GARY STOOD IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD AND watched the big machine disappear from sight round a right-hand bend, with that plunging motion which is a peculiarity of American cars when driven violently, he experienced an icy sensation at the back of his ears. The last fragment of musical-comedy atmosphere was abruptly shattered and in its place arose an air of definite menace. There was an indescribable realism about that headlong rush, a deadly seriousness in the thing's beetling prow, a sinister suggestion of mechanical ruthlessness in its swift and silent gathering of speed. He plucked off his hat and stared after it, combing his hair with his fingers.

"*Phew !*" he said

Not so good. For a long time he stood in the middle of the roadway while anxious pictures superimposed themselves on each other in his brain. A crowd of gangsters. The rat-tat-tat of machine-guns. The scream of sirens. The coming and going of the car had uncovered the little place which is kept in every modern mind for a neurosis about these things. Not so good ! With a sweeping glance he discovered a telephone booth. He bolted for it and dialled her number.

"*Elysées vingt-cinq vingt-sept !*" Came her voice. "Allo ?"

"*Are you all right ?*"

A click answered him. He swore, "God darn the woman !" and dialled again.

He heard the bell ringing in his ear, and stared up under furrowed brows at her windows opposite. The ringing stopped.

"Hallo ! Are you there ? Hey ! Can you hear me ? Stephanie !"

The line was silent She had taken off the receiver
"Operator! Hey! Operator!" He rattled the
rest, turned all the handles in sight, pressed button A,
button B, showered in twenty-five centime pieces, and
eventually obtained the operator

"Élysées twenty-five twenty-seven! *Vingt-cinq
vingt-sept!* And say, sister! Heterodyne it, will you?
The receiver's off"

He waited, grimacing with impatience He heard
the high-pitched whine which he knew lifted up its
tiny voice from the receiver in the flat

"*Pas de réponse, monsieur*"

"Hell! Okay, sister Thanks all the same"

He crashed out of the box and stood gazing up
What should "A" do now?

He turned in disgust, and beheld a black marble slab
with the words, chiselled in faded gilt, "*Chambres
meublées*" He turned in at once and interviewed a
woman with sandy streaks in her grey hair

"I want one of these *chambres myoribly* Have you
got one overlooking the street?"

"*Sur la rue? Mais oui, monsieur!*"

"It's mine," Gary said "Will you fetch my baggage
over from the Ritz?"

The lady's eyes opened wide with respect and aston-
ishment "*Hotel Ritz, monsieur?*"

"Yeah," Gary said

"*Monsieur a perdu sa fortune?*"

"Yeah," Gary agreed "*J'ai perdoo ma fortune,
j'ai perdoo ma fille Et aussi j'ai perdoo la ploom de ma
tante* Is there a telephone?"

"*Oui, monsieur!*" *Élysées vingt-deux trente-sept*"

"Thanks, ma" Gary walked across the road, took
a two-hundred-franc note out of his wallet and thumbed
it under the nose of the concierge

"*Mademoiselle Dubois,*" he whispered

"*Oui, oui, monsieur! Mademoiselle Dubois! Ah
comme elle est ravissante! Comme elle est—*"

"Yeah We know all about that Now let's try and get this across Every-time-she-comes-out "

"*Pardon, monsieur ?*"

"Mademoiselle Dubois go out—you telephone me !"

"*Oui, oui, monsieur !*"

"Have you got that ? Well, say it "

"*Mademoiselle Dubois va sortir*"—he made a gesture indicative of a body passing into the street—"je"—he pointed to himself—"vous"—he pointed to Gary—"telephone "

"That's right," said Gary "Two hundred francs "

"*Merci, monsieur ! Merci infiniment ! Merci mille fois !*"

Gary wagged a finger at him "Mind you do Every time Understand ? Every-time-Mademoiselle-Dubois-go-out——"

"*Oui, oui Je vous telephone* "

Gary put his hands expressively at the concierge's throat "If you let her go out once without letting me know——"

The concierge's eyes rolled "*Oui, oui, monsieur Entendu* "

"That's fine," said Gary "Élysées two-two-three-seven Better let me write it down "

He wrote it down, and the concierge, taking a pencil from his waistcoat, licked it and, with immense deliberation, placed a neat line across the tail of the seven

He settled himself in his new home to wait He did not have to wait very long It was that very night, as he stood in the darkened room, looking out through the tall lace curtains of the window, that he became aware of the watcher

The watcher took shape in the rotund bowler-hatted figure of a little man who wandered aimlessly about the pavement opposite His peculiarity was that he was never still He was most actively and nervously engaged upon nothing He placed his hands firmly

behind his back and leaned forward to peer intently down a drain. He stood jerkily upright, took six paces smartly to the westward, stopped, fumbled anxiously in all his pockets, and lit a cigarette. In the jumping light of it Gary caught a momentary glimpse of shining apple-cheeks and piggy eyes. Then the flame vanished abruptly, and the little man, with quick excitable gestures, walked up to the two tall doors, kicked one of them, took six steps backwards on his toes, spun round, removed his bowler hat, smoothed his hair, replaced his hat, looked left, looked right, looked down the drain, extinguished the cigarette between two fingers, put the remainder of it behind his ear, put his hands behind his back, gazed up, so that he would have seen Gary if Gary had not quickly dodged, looked down again, put his hands in his pockets, and began pacing up and down with busy strides.

For two hours Gary watched him, and he was in constant movement all the time. He darted about with all the nervous, irritable indecision of the domestic hen. He was infuriating, but he was also sinister. There was something about that ceaseless, unflagging energy which affected Gary with a queer sensation of strain, as if the pulse of things became erratic and worked suddenly faster. His movements were so quick, his glances were so abrupt. Many times, when all seemed safe, and his attention riveted upon some object at the far end of the street, the little man had revolved with startling rapidity upon his heel and Gary had dodged involuntarily back into the darkness.

Once he could have sworn that he had been seen, but the last lighted bus which thundered past on its way home shed its glare upon him, and Gary saw that the round face which stared up at him peered up with its eyes shut. Or were they shut? With those little piggy eyes it was so hard to tell.

Gary reached back into the room for the plate of bananas which his landlady had left for him on the

table, and peeled and ate one very slowly indeed When he had finished it he reached back again with his hand, pitched the skin on the table, and, feeling like a blind man, sought for and found the telephone

He rang her up, and her voice answered him as it had answered before, giving the number of her telephone
"Stephanie——"

A click He shrugged, put the telephone back on the table, felt for and found another banana

At two o'clock in the morning, when the clocks of Paris agreed majestically to differ, the little man, who had been pacing furiously westward, suddenly continued in that direction without looking back once, and was lost to sight Another vigil was over Gary smoked a cigarette in the darkness, then drawing the curtains and flicking on the light, sank upon his bed, yawned, wagged his head to himself, said "Geeze", or words to that effect, took off his shoes, cleaned his teeth, and went to bed

In the morning the little man was at his post again

It was nearly nine when Gary saw him first, and there was no telling how long he had been there Gary cursed himself for a sleep-ridden hound, and became lost for a little while in admiration for the way in which that same erratic activity, which had seemed so odd in a deserted street, fitted, in the daytime, into the bustle and activity which went on all around The little man took his place automatically in the street scene At one moment he gazed into a shop window A moment later he seemed just to have arrived, and was but one of twenty persons who had stepped off from a bus A few seconds later he was waiting for a friend Another twenty and he was waiting for a gap in the traffic to cross the road Another ten, and he had apparently crossed it without once having left the pavement, and was bustling off for an appointment A moment later he was sauntering away from a café with a new packet of cigarettes Then the telephone rang Gary hurled himself upon the instrument

It was his friend the concierge "*Mademoiselle va descendre par l'ascenseur, monsieur*"

"Gee! Is that elevator working?"

"*Oui, monsieur*"

"Stop it! Stall it! Open the door or something
Keep her in conversation"

He flung on his clothes like a fighting cock fighting, and without waiting to tie his shoes or to fasten the tie about his neck, clattered out of the place, buttoning buttons as he went

Silently he blessed the concierge Stephanie and the Grand Duchess and that worthy were deep in a tripartite argument about the machinations of the lift at the foot of the stairs as he arrived, in breathless excitement

The concierge bowed to him with a gruff absence of recognition, and retired

Stephanie looked in the other direction

"Good morning, brother," said the Grand Duchess gravely "More bodyguard stuff? There is something very Lord Byron about your tie"

"I only just got up," explained Gary shortly "You're being watched"

The Grand Duchess stiffened "*Watched?* What do you mean, young man? How do you know?"

"Little guy outside on the street," said Gary, panting "Wearing a derby and clucking about like a pigeon looking for grain He was there for four and a half hours last night Went away at two o'clock He's outside again this morning"

"Dear me," said the Grand Duchess

"I am not afraid," said Stephanie

"Maybe not," said Gary

There was a pause while the Grand Duchess looked sharply at Stephanie, and Stephanie looked out towards the street, and Gary faced them anxious, panting and dishevelled In the end it was Stephanie who spoke, staring severely at a point just above Gary's head

"The Grand Duchess and I," she said, "are grateful for the information. We thank you. Are you coming, Aunt?"

The Duchess hesitated. "Very well, dear," she agreed, a little nervously. "Perhaps we shall see you some other time, Mr. Williams?"

"Just turn your head around any time you like," Gary assured her, "and remember what happened yesterday."

"Yesterday?" said the Grand Duchess, stopping short. "Something has happened yesterday?"

"Really, Aunt?" Stephanie interrupted quickly. "Are we not taking rather a lot of this gentleman's time?"

"It wasn't anything very much," said Gary. "Simply that I saved her life. I happened to be passing at the time."

"A shot?" the Grand Duchess asked quickly.

"No. An automobile."

Stephanie shrugged impatiently. "He is exaggerating. It was an accident."

This time it was Gary's turn to stare just above Stephanie's head. He stared with such fixity that presently she faltered and turned, with curiosity and foreboding. He was staring at the lift, which hung suspended about eighteen inches above the first-floor level. Stephanie quickly put the back of her wrist to her mouth with a gasp of fright.

"*Qu'est-ce-qu'il-y-a?*" demanded the Grand Duchess, frowning. Then she saw it too.

"*Concierge!*" yelled Gary. "*Hey, concierge! Come here a minute, will you?*"

The concierge came bustling at an excitable but ineffective double. "*Monsieur?*"

"See anything about that elevator?"

The concierge looked up, screwing his eyes. "He lives where I arrested him, monsieur."

"Take a look at that rope," said Gary quietly.

The concierge's mouth dropped open. He yammered. The Grand Duchess sat down with a quick

corkscrew motion on the bottom step of the stairs and leant her head against the wall

"Yeah," said Gary slowly "I guess that's how we all feel" He took the piece of cardboard with the word '*Reparations*' on it, which was lying on the floor, and hung it on the handle of the open door Then he turned on his heel, walked out with long grim strides into the street, and hailed a taxi He opened the door

"Wait!"

"*Oui, monsieur*"

The little man in the bowler hat darted swiftly to the *couturier's* window and became absorbed in the two portions of a black woollen bathing suit Gary walked up to him and put an arm round his shoulder

"Howya?" he demanded affectionately

The little man struggled like an eel

"Hey! No you don't!" Gary held his head in the crook of his elbow "Well! It certainly is a surprise running into you Say, it certainly is a small world! Now what d'you know about that?"

He eased him, cajolingly, towards the taxi door

"That's a darned nice tie you're wearing, Henry Is your name Henry? Well, that certainly is a swell tie Now In here, Henry *In* you go, old pal of my boyhood days Urtcha! Gently does it Now, *here* we go"

He lifted him up still by means of the arm round his neck and swung his little kicking legs on to the floor of the cab

"*There* we are," said Gary brightly, altering his hold to a grip on the front of the collar He drew back his right arm, took careful aim, and put every ounce of strength into one vicious, deeply satisfying, piston-stroke to the jaw Then he closed the door tenderly upon the remains

"Monte Cristo office, Champs Élysées"

"*Bien, monsieur*"

Gary took a handkerchief from his pocket and wrapped it thoughtfully about his knuckles

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

A WEEK PASSED A WEEK OF ANXIOUS WAITING A week whose absence of further incident took on the eerie quality of the quiet before the storm

For a whole week Gary's increasing sense of disquiet was fed by the surprising and very curious absence of any sign of life from Stephanie and the Grand Duchess The two tall windows opposite remained obstinately closed Not once, from his own window, had he seen so much as a curtain move A dozen times a day he rang them on the telephone and the bell resounded faintly in what might have been an empty flat A dozen times a day he demanded of the concierge whether or not mademoiselle and madame had gone out They never had Twice, with an expression of deepening anxiety, he had bounded up the seven flights of stairs and, after a modest hesitation, had rung the doorbell insistently There was no reply Once he had beaten heavily on the door and shouted "Hey! It's me! Gary!"

He might have shouted in a tomb

He spent hours every day watching from his window The pavement opposite remained strangely innocent of the apple-cheeked little man, or indeed of anyone who loitered with sinister intent The absence of any such thing, the complete vacuousness of those few dozen paving-stones, seemed to him to grow daily more sinister than would have seemed the presence of the watcher himself

At the end of four days of this absolute immobility Gary had reached a condition of definite alarm By the sixth day his head became so filled with impossible forebodings and frantic imaginings that he admitted to himself that he was in what amounted to almost an agony of fear

The silence was getting him down, and he knew it. The ordinary movement and hurry of people in the street, the passage of the traffic and the heartless concentration of the citizens of Paris upon their daily lives, filled him with such a sense of callousness that he grew resentful, and damned them for it. No poster mentioned this hiding of a princess. No newsboy cried aloud the news. The people who shopped, and strolled, and strode to work, and fought their way home, knew nothing of what went on behind those two curtained windows. They neither knew nor cared. No light ever showed by night. Indeed he came to wonder whether they were really there, whether, indeed, the summons of his telephone did ring in an empty flat, whether the concierge lied, whether they were in hiding somewhere, whether perhaps—whether perhaps they had been made away with. Did these things happen in Paris? If they did, one noticed nothing in the street. Before him stretched rows of windows, all tall, all curtained, all closed, all blank to what went on behind them. They said France was civilized, yet

On the seventh day he could endure the strain no longer.

"Where *are* they?" he pleaded of the concierge. "Are they upstairs? How do you know they're upstairs? Does anybody send food up to them? Have you seen them? Has anybody seen them?"

"*Mais non*!" said the concierge.

"No food has gone up?"

"They live perhaps out of tins, monsieur. *Je vous assure qu'ils demeurent en haut*."

Gary banged the lid of his *gunchet*. "Yes, but how do you *know*?"

"They have not come out, monsieur."

"Do you see everybody who comes out?"

"*Mais naturellement, monsieur*."

"Is there a back way out?"

"*Pour les patrons, non* "

"For the service?"

The concierge laughed in a bass voice at the preposterous ignorance of the question "*Pour les marchandises, bien sure*!"

Gary compressed his lips "I'm going up I'm going to break in"

The concierge expostulated like the going-off of dynamite "*Mais, monsieur*!"

"Have you had the elevator fixed?"

"*Pas encore, monsieur Il-y-a des petits reparations* "

"Come on," said Gary

"*Mais, monsieur! Je proteste!* There is a right, absolutely inalienable, that the privacy of the patrons——"

But Gary was already plunging up the stairs The concierge sighed, wiped his cheek with the ball of his thumb in doubt, and followed Gary reached the door a flight ahead, and beat on it desperately with both fists

"Hey!" he yelled "Hey! Open up! Are you all right? Hey, Stephanie!"

He was met with an ominous silence

"Monsieur!" implored the concierge "I beg of you to desist I implore you to consider the reputation of these apartments Monsieur, I am at your feet"

"I'm going in," Gary said shortly "Look out!"

He took a run at the door and hurled himself against it with his shoulder It stood firm

"Monsieur——"

"Look out, will you! Stand away if you don't want to get hurt" Gary repeated the assault The door resisted him with perfect dignity

"Come on!" Gary said

The concierge shrugged his shocked compliance

They took up their positions

"Are you ready?—steady—*umph*!"

The door crashed open Gary and the concierge tumbled into the room, clutching each other

The place was in darkness The blinds were drawn
Gary flung them up, threw open the windows
"Stephanie!" he shouted, rushing into the other room
This, too, was dark.

"Stephanie?"

He let those blinds fly up too The room was
scrupulously neat The piano was shut The fireplace
was swept The ornate gilded sofa was hidden under
a dust-sheet, and the enamelled clock upon the mantel-
piece had stopped

Gary and the concierge stared at each other

"They've gone!" said Gary wildly "Where have
they gone to?"

"They have departed by the service lift, monsieur"

Gary looked over his shoulder and hurried into the
bedroom He let the light upon it, slowly this time

There were evidences of packing The big dressing-
table in the window, which had once done service, he
now realized, as a bar, showed a plain glass top The
drawers beneath it when he rattled them open were
empty A few pieces of crumpled newspaper, torn as
if they had been used to stuff the inside of shoes, lay
loosely in one corner He stooped and picked one of
them up It was a Parisian evening newspaper, dated
six days ago, and on the back page, in a tangle of
sporting intelligence and photographs *Le Match de
Football*, the crinkled face of Stephanie peered at him

"Hey," said Gary "Look at this"

The concierge peered over his elbow

"*Mais, c'est Mademoiselle Dubois!*" he exclaimed

"Read it! Read it, man! For God's sake! What
does it say?"

The concierge placed a pair of glasses upon his nose
and read

"*Son Altesse Hereditaire—Elle est donc une princesse?*"

"Yeah Go on, man! Go on!"

"Who goes," said the concierge, translating, "to
marry herself, *Octobre cinq*"

"Who *went* to marry herself," Gary amended solemnly "They stopped that all right" Suddenly his hand trembled as he held the paper

"*Épouvantable !*" the concierge was exclaiming, over and over again

Gary pointed to the newspaper with a shaking finger "That's tomorrow !" he said

"*Oui, oui,*" agreed the concierge noncommittally "*Oui Le cinquième, c'est demain*"

Gary scuffed the paper into a ball and then stared at the concierge with owlsh eyes

"My God !" said Gary, *sotto voce* "*It's murder !* What are we going to do ? How am I going to find out where they are ?"

"*Le fiancé ?*" suggested the concierge, mildly

Gary thrust him out of the way, made for the door and bolted down the stairs like a man demented He flung out into the street and began running down it—and then stopped with a queer sense of having forgotten something There was something he should have noticed He turned and looked back He frowned, and advanced upon the phenomenon stealthily

Two workmen on ladders busied themselves with the erection of an awning One of them was a little man with apple cheeks and piggy eyes

For a full half-minute Gary took in the fantastic details of this apparently amiable scene with every unpleasant sensation of blank dismay, of uncomprehending fear The little man, observing that he appeared to be the object of attention, raised his bowler hat politely He spat upon his hands and, with a pointing forefinger, issued a string of instructions to his mate

Gary turned tail and fled, pursued by a nameless horror At the end of the street he turned up by the little church of Saint Philippe du Roule, tore through the astonished saunterers of the Lido Arcade, and, coming into the Champs Élysées, stopped bewildered Where did the Prince live ?

He searched feverishly in his pockets Where was the damned visiting-card the Prince had given him? He knew the place was somewhere over a bridge You went right over a bridge, and then you ran alongside the river, and then you turned—you must have turned right, for if you turned left that would bring you over the river again, and there was no sense in it—you turned right! *Somewhere* on the right Could a guy remember the place if he saw it again? It was the only chance

"Taxi! Taxi!"

He clambered aboard the machine

"Just drive," shouted Gary, flinging himself on the floor to give directions through the dividing window "I'll tell you Get going, will you? Over the bridge"

"*Monsieur a aucune préférence*"

"The first darned bridge you come to Come on, let's go!"

The Parisian taxi-driver is just as elated at the prospect of going nowhere in particular as in any other direction They "got going" with a certain amount of *éclat* They rattled between the great gold eagles on the pylons of the Pont Alexandre IV

"That's right! That's right!" cried Gary excitedly "Keep going Left!"

"*A gauche, monsieur*"

"Yeah! Left!"

They trundled alongside the course of the river

Gary knelt on the floor, looking up to scrutinize the buildings intently

"Not so fast Gently now Gently" He recognized the small tobacconist's "*Right!*"

They swung round into a broad street with trams It was the Boulevard Raspail, though he did not know it

"Go on! Go on! Keep going! Two kilometres! *Allez! Vite!*"

They went fast It was not so fast as the Prince would have conducted a carriage, but it was fast

enough. They bumped and bounded over the pot-holes. They slewed in and out of the tramlines. They rattled and banged, while Gary gripped the windows to steady himself and stared rapidly about him. A café passed. He recognized it. A broad intersection with some sort of tin shelter in the centre. He knew that too.

"Right ahead! Keep going!"

It was not so easy. There was some sort of a traffic tangle. The traffic policeman was blowing shrill blasts on his whistle, and gesticulating frantically with his wand. They were held up for some time by the traffic lights, but when they changed to green there was no going on. The lights changed back again to red. Somewhere an electric bell was jangling. The policeman descended from his island and advanced with majestic impotence upon the inextricable disarray of cars. The lights changed from red to green and from green to red. The traffic piled up behind them. It piled up on either side. The inevitable motor-horns cried their impatience to heaven.

"Do something!" ordered Gary. "We've got to get through here!"

The taxi-driver added the shrill scream of his horn to the rest. Then he shrugged, dismounted, and went for a little walk towards the hub of the confusion. Gary cursed inwardly to allay his fears and leaned out of the window. As far as his eye could see stretched an intricate disorder of the roofs of cars, as if the imps whom it amuses to do these things had thrown down a handful of dominoes.

Presently the driver came back. "*Il-y-a un accident. Quelqu'un est blessé*." As if to point his words a new bell sounded, and Gary saw the white top of an ambulance thread its way through the confusion.

Gary got out of the cab and stood with its driver in the roadway. He took out a packet of Camels and offered the man a cigarette. He was in need of companionship.

"I go round?" the driver suggested, accepting it, and making a circulatory motion with it to indicate his meaning

"That's no good," said Gary "If you go round I shall lose the way"

There was a converging movement upon the ambulance By standing to his full height Gary could just see over the heads of the crowd to its roof He saw the tops of its doors open He saw the head of a man in a uniform and cap get down A chill wind rustled his hair from the north He shivered, and, for the sake of exercise and because there seemed little else to do, he began to press his way forward

He did not get very far The doors of the ambulance closed again The crowd surged forward, now carrying Gary beyond volition He saw the white roof reverse, heard the bell clanging, heard gruff shouting, and watched the ambulance disappear

The crowd turned to go then, all except Gary When the corpse of the injured one has been taken away there is nothing of further interest to a Parisian A few battered cars perhaps Paris is too used to that But Gary, struggling against the stream of deeply satisfied onlookers, came at last to all that was left of a Rolls-Royce car and all that was left of a taxi The taxi had had the worst of it It sat in the road, wheel-less, with concertinaed bonnet and engine forced up in all its ugly nakedness through the floorboards It was a taxi with wicker doors

Gary opened one of them to make quite certain It was a foregone conclusion There was the photograph of Prince Paul beside the potted fern

Gary shut the door again and gripped his upper lip with his lower teeth Then he asked a question of the universe

"Say, what d'you know!"

He could have sworn the universe answered that it was very much afraid.

For a little while he stood next to the taxi glancing uncertainly this way and that, and seemed to gather some comfort from its proximity. A sudden thought struck him then, so that his scalp moved backwards.

"What hospital?" he demanded. "What hospital? Did any of you people notice where they took that boy?"

A French senator murmured something about the Seine.

"Thanks," said Gary, cantering to his cab.

"Seine Hospital! Do you know the Seine Hospital?"

The taxi-driver nodded and drove him there brilliantly. Gary ran up the broad stone steps, through the Corinthian capitals and dived through the big swing-door.

"I want to see the Prince! Prince Paul! Have you got Prince Paul of Monte Cristo here?"

There was a very leisurely old gentleman who licked his fingers and laboriously turned the pages of an enormous book.

"Stop thumbing the encyclopædia!" shouted Gary, exasperated. "He's the last guy in! Or do they have more than one accident every minute in Paris?"

The concierge placed a very dirty forefinger against the most recent entry in the book. "Perhaps monsieur the Prince has been injured *incognito*."

"Yeah," breathed Gary. "He might, at that!"

"*Premier étage à gauche*," said the concierge.

Gary raced up a noble staircase, miraculously avoided collision with a pretty young nurse who was carrying a white porcelain tray of surgical instruments, and was brought up sharp by the bloodcurdling spectacle of five white-coated men propelling a chromium-plated trolley on which was stretched, beneath a shroud, the outline of a man. Gary crammed his fingers in his mouth, and, rooted to the spot, watched the *cortège* disappear through a swing-door marked "X."

"Hey!" shouted Gary, suddenly galvanized into life. "Hey, Paul!" He made a dive for the door.

Two more white-coated men sprang from nowhere and stopped him just in time

"Let me go, will you!" panted Gary, struggling desperately "I tell you I've got to see that guy Paul! Let go of me will you? Paul! Hey, Paul! It's me! Gary!"

"It is not permitted to go in there," they told him breathlessly "*Il est absolument interdit au public*"

"I tell you I've got to go in! Paul! Let me in! Can you hear me?"

The two men held him in a grip of iron

"You cannot go in," said one

"He is anaesthetized They are operating," said the second

"His name is not Paul," said the first

"I know! I know! He's incognito! I tell you, that's Prince Paul of Monte Cristo!"

"I am sorry, my young friend," said the first of the two gentlemen, who was bald and not undistinguished, "that is Monsieur Henri Martin He is a deputy, *très, très connu*"

Gary relaxed and they took their hands off him "Well, where is Prince Paul?"

"That," replied the gentleman, who really spoke very good English indeed, "I fear I am quite unable to elucidate At all events, he is not in this hospital"

"Not in the *hospital*?"

"Alas, no, monsieur"

"I don't believe you! He just came in in an ambulance"

"Some other hospital perhaps, monsieur"

"But they brought him in in an ambulance!"

The doctor shrugged "In every hospital in Paris, monsieur, there is someone who has just come in in an ambulance"

Gary weakened "Well, what hospital?"

"I could not say, monsieur"

Gary broke into a sweat "I've got to find him!" Gary declared "It's a matter of life and death"

"*On peut téléphoner*——" the doctor suggested

"Say! Thanks for the idea! From here?"

"Certainly The concierge——"

Gary clattered down the stairs and addressed himself to the elderly man again

"Every hospital in Paris! Understand? Prince Paul of Monte Cristo! Have you got that?"

"*Oui, oui, monsieur Prince Paul de Monte Cristo*"

"Let me know when you locate him I need air," said Gary "I need a cigarette"

He went outside and sat in the attitude of Rodin's "Thinker"

He never knew how long he sat there, for he was disheartened and dismayed and a prey to nameless bogies. He did not once go back through the swing-doors to see how the concierge fared, but from time to time he turned his head and peered with furrowed brow to the place where a small electric light illuminated the concierge's hands as he dialled steadfastly with the stub of a pencil. Presently, however, the unusual behaviour of a certain taxi impinged itself dubiously upon his consciousness. Several times already this taxi had driven past the foot of the steps with thoughtful deliberation and its driver had stared up at him intently as he passed. Gary's mind had registered this phenomenon without appearing to notice it, but now when the same machine passed for the seventh time he took his hands down from his brow and stared at it. Immediately he was greeted with a prolonged and jubilant fanfare upon its horn.

Gary stood up. If he had carried a gun he would have placed his hand upon it now. Since he did not carry one he began to advance cautiously down the steps with both fists clenched, like a man carefully wading out of his depth.

"My boon companion!" cried a voice. "My Grand Vizier!"

For the second time that afternoon Gary's scalp

moved "Paul!" He galloped down the last remaining steps "What in Hades are you doing here? You're supposed to be smashed to pulp! This isn't your cab?"

"You like it?" enquired Prince Paul, grinning "She is quite, quite new She is a beauty, *n'est-ce-pas*?"

"Say, what about the *accident*? They carried you off in an ambulance!"

"Ah no, my friend His Hereditary Highness Prince Paul is the most gifted driver in Paris When Prince Paul has a little *contretemps* with another *voiture* it is not Prince Paul who departs by ambulance *Ah non*, my friend! You do me an injustice"

"You mean it was the other guy?"

"Poor fellow!" said Prince Paul "He is very much wounded?"

"Shot to bits," said Gary, beginning to grin "Where did you find the cab?"

Prince Paul of Monte Cristo shrugged

"The other one, she was a little old *Enfin*, the insurance companies are very good to me" He pulled Gary nearer to him by the lapel of his coat and whispered "I have just done a hundred and fifteen in the Avenue Foch!"

Gary laughed and then suddenly remembered his fears "Gee, I've been trailing you all over Paris! Do you know what's happened to Stephanie?"

The Prince appeared to be fighting for time "You mean the Princess Stephanie?"

"Sure The *Princess* Stephanie Have it your own way Do you know where she is?"

"I have not any idea," said Prince Paul

"But you're getting married tomorrow!"

"Ah," said Prince Paul "There is one of those things"

"What d'you mean?"

Prince Paul sighed again "We are not getting married tomorrow"

"*You're not getting married ?*"

Prince Paul took a deep breath "My friend," he explained solemnly, "I have the soul of a taxi-driver Me, I am certain of this For years when I have been forced to be a taxi-driver I, have always wanted to be a Prince I have looked forward to the after midnight But now now that I have the chance to reverse the position I do not wish it I know that I shall be forced to be a Prince, I shall wish all the time to be a taxi-driver Leave Paris ? The streets ? The traffic ? The lights ? The deftness of the eye, the quickness of the wrist ? Ah no, my friend You will never be a Grand Vizier I shall never be a Prince *Je reste content* I shall be happy with my little Fifi I am what I am I am the most gifted chauffeur in Paris "

"But they're putting up the awning ! They're putting it up this minute ! One of the guys whose putting it up is a paid assassin of Old Reynaud's !"

"There will be no one to assassinate The marriage will not take place "

"Have you have you told Stephanie about this ?"

"*Naturellement* It is for that reason that she has gone away "

"*Gone away ?*"

"She has gone away Alone She is too spirited for me I have not the stomach for it "

Gary shook the Prince roughly "Where ? Where's she gone ?"

"To Monte Cristo," said the Prince calmly "*Ah, vous en bel endroit* "

Gary swallowed three times "How long will it take you to get to the station ?"

The Prince smiled "*Montez, my friend,*" he answered "We will see what she can do "

PART SIX

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

IT WAS ELEVEN O'CLOCK THE NEXT MORNING WHEN the Grand Express Européen, which had thundered all night long through the wind and the rain and the great distances of France, emerged suddenly from the last tunnel and began to sidle along the precipitous rock-face on whose precarious surface is perched the town of Monte Cristo

As his carriage window slowly circled the bay Gary could see, far down below, the sunlit white harbour, with its two almost improbably neat arms daintily enclosing a square of bright-blue Mediterranean and the yachts of millionaires

The royal palace revolved slowly into view, with its irregular russet roofs and its white walls seeming to grow out of the gleaming rock itself, which jutted, with a kind of miniature sturdiness, into the sea. A bright cold sun threw the patterns on the rock and the lines of the pantiles into sharp relief. It was like a toy town, with a toy citadel, and a toy harbour containing model yachts. The palm trees lifted their tiny fronds between the houses, and the flamboyant Casino poked rococo roofs at him as it swung into his line of vision, standing among minute flower-beds of marvellous orderliness, with its terraces running down in little sweeps to overhang the sea. A flag flew from it. The Republican Tricolour, red, white and red. There was another floating proudly from the royal palace where very minor Royalty had once cavorted, but which now was filled with the soft hurry of infinitesimal waiters ministering to the slightest wants of the microscopic inhabitants of the Royal Palace Hotel.

The train, seeming unnecessarily large and logical and travel-stained and unkempt, excused its presence with

a polite hiss of steam, and stopped at the small platform, feeling awkward Gary clambered down from it, stood for a moment wrinkling his face in the sun, and caught a sharp whiff of mimosa He sneezed

"Portez vos bagages, monsieur ?"

Gary turned to the blue-bloused porter "Sorry, pal, I don't have any *bagages* "

He took his place with his less affluent fellow-passengers in the dubiously tilted carriage of the cog railway which travels up and down between the station and the town They set forth, grinding and clanking and jolting downwards at an angle of fifty degrees, through stony ground, among stunted cacti, through back gardens, between the cliff-like backs of the first apartment houses, and so through a short tunnel to the small glass-covered station which stands at the head of the main square opposite to the Casino

The scene was unchanged since that day which seemed five years ago, but could not in reality have been much more than six weeks, when he had travelled over by bus to give his dutiful once-over to the principality That was before Stephanie had come into his life

The same superlative cars were parked all round the ornamental gardens in a neat row, alongside a neat row of Jerusalem artichokes The same revolving hose-attachment sprayed the same plume of water on the same bright green grass The palm trees rustled a little in the warm south wind The same comically ornamental policeman with the ropes and tackles across his chest and the white helmet stood in the same spot looking as ridiculous and as endearing and as moustachioed as ever The same Hispano-Suiza sat back elegantly on its haunches before the great portal of the Hôtel de France The same negro commissioner removed his hat and bowed with a flash of the same white teeth to the same or similar lovely ladies who came haughtily down the steps On the other side the same international throng sat at the same

clutch of tables outside the Café de France, and the same Oriental carpet-sellers wandered in and out between the chairs, selling, apparently, the self-same carpets. Before him rose the gay, the orgiastic Casino, its masonry sprouting muscular female torsos and its windows all intertwined with cupids. The doors were open, and to the right, beside the smaller entrance to the hall which was used sometimes for ballet and sometimes for the best music in the world, was the same cinema poster of his namesake, Gary Cooper, which had smiled shyly to him on his previous visit.

How in hell to find Stephanie? How in blazes to begin? He strode towards the Casino, scrutinizing the faces of the passers-by, his lips pursed in a non-committal and inaudible whistle. Here were old gentlemen and old ladies of every nation in the world. Here also were English people. But there was no Stephanie. He went among the tables of the Café de France. But she was not there. He strolled like a loiterer, up the steps of the Casino, and stood in front of a yellow paper notice, not reading it, but keeping a strictly disinterested eye upon the patrons as they arrived. He teetered up and down the topmost step several times in an undecided manner, and entered in.

He found that he was boxed off from the main hall, with its painted ceilings and its relays of cupids and cornucopiæ, by glass partitions, and that a queue of twenty persons or so had formed before an official at a table. Since nothing else suggested itself, he added his own loose-knit person to the queue.

He discovered that he was waiting his turn to present his passport, and when the time came he presented it. The official perused its particulars, compared the photograph somewhat incredulously with the original, and began a painful transcription of the details on to a form in a spidery, steeply inclined script. He had that same little trick that so many Frenchmen have, when writing, of making nervous passes with the pen

just above the paper before pouncing on it with spirited determination. He *painted* his letters with the quick, uncertain dabs of an artist, and when he came to sign his own signature at the foot of the document he paused for a long time, inscribed his name, and then, making passes once more, added a sudden, childish, decorative underlining in the composition of which his pen made a sound which brought a sudden glower of suspicion into Gary's eyes. The scratching which his pen had made was a recognizable long and two shorts.

"Thirty francs, monsieur."

Gary took out three ten-franc notes and flicked them on to the table.

"*Merci, monsieur*. The card lasts for thirty days. After that it can be renewed." His manner was irreproachable, his face expressionless. But as he raised his eyes to Gary's they lingered in a hard stare for a moment or two longer than would have seemed necessary.

"Fine!" said Gary, breaking his soundless whistle in the middle of a phrase to interpolate the word, and, without altering his expression, wandered through the doors.

Gary had been here before. He had seen the English colonels and the Argentine gentlemen, the Greek merchants and the Levantine Jews, the English spinsters, the French Duchesses, the American beauties, and the soft-treading cosmopolitans with cat-like mannerisms and seamed faces. He had marvelled before at the religious rectitude which settled upon the faces of these people, the almost fervent assumption of devotional self-complacency, as if the parable of the Pharisee had been modishly reversed, and, standing before the shrine of the devil, they thanked God that they were not as other men. The scene had amused Gary considerably as an objective scene. Now there was a queer element of suspense which crept in. There

was something here which puzzled him. Was it an elaborate dissimulation of abnormality? Something was brewing beneath all this. Perhaps it was imagination, perhaps nothing but an attack of nerves, but Gary felt himself indescribably attuned to tension.

The tension was not discernible among the members of the public—they played and won and watched and lost with the same careful, immobile impassivity as before, it manifested itself subtly among the employees of the establishment. As the croupiers sat over their wheels and flicked pink chips neatly this way and that with their ebony rakes there was much nervous twiddling of moustaches, and a great coming and going of harassed-looking officials in correct black, and whispered conversations and urgent messages to be mumbled into ears and received with diplomatic inattention. Gary watched them, wondering. Even the flunkies, standing about in pairs, whose duty, if rumour was to be believed, lay not so much in the creation of an air of splendour as in the swift removal of unexpected corpses or the instant application of stomach-pumps to intending suicides, muttered anxiously to one another as they stared before them with unwinking eyes. There were messages for them as well.

With a little pulse working in his temple, Gary took note of these things. Suddenly it seemed to his overwrought consciousness that the tiny code signal was all about him. It jumped out at him from every side. If a man idly flicked a packet of notes with his fingers while waiting to change them at the *caisse*, he flicked them with an apparently unthinking repetition of that rhythm. If the cashier hesitated for a moment over the sum of mental arithmetic involved in paying out chips or money, he pitched the things down on the counter in that self-same way. The constant reiteration of it became illusive and disturbing and uncanny, like the chirrup of hidden grasshoppers. He never

could be certain from which direction it came Rat tat-tat A long and two shorts It was everywhere in the unending, airless room Somewhere a man turned on electric-light switches, first one and then another two Outside a man tugged at the cord of the sticking sunblind of one of the immense windows, three times, just like that And when he released it the cord swung against the glass with a noise which made Gary jump, as if at the report of a revolver—*three* reports At one of the tables the croupier, who was politely waiting while a dispute between two ladies at the far end of the table was amicably resolved by a higher official, tapped out the rhythm monotonously with the little ivory ball on the centre of the wheel When the dispute was settled, "*Faites vos jeux*," cried the croupier And the intonation conveyed the same secret tocsin behind the words

An impulse formed in Gary's brain, an irresistible impulse to give the sign himself It struck him as rather a suicidal thing to do, but he wanted to see if anything happened He cast about him for some plausible excuse, and then, with completely non-committal features, he wandered up to the *caisse*, and while he waited for a fat German lady to receive her winnings he began to drum with his fingers on the ledge, *rum-tiddle, rum-tiddle, rum-tiddle* He strained his attention for some indication that somewhere in that room his message was understood None came He went on drumming The German lady moved away He opened his wallet and threw down three notes of twenty francs First one, and then two

"In tens, monsieur?"

"Fives," said Gary, drumming on the desk

The cashier took a neat pile of ten pink chips and set them before him with a nimble flick The other two followed separately

Gary strove to hide the thrill that this small transaction gave him Keeping his face a blank, he collected

the chips and strolled over to that table where the croupier had beat the rhythm with the ball. He waited for the end of the spin and then threw his stake, one on black, two, in quick succession, on the even chance.

The other stakes poured on to the table

"Messieurs et dames—faites vos jeux"

The croupier's rake came out and casually flicked Gary's two chips so that they lay one beside the other instead of one on top of the other.

"Rien ne va plus"

The wheel spun. The ball rocketed and bounced and settled in a number.

"Le douze!"

Gary waited, tense. The croupier's rake was active, pulling in here, flicking aside there, collecting, examining, rejecting, paying out, catching chips that were pitched to it, like an extra limb. Gary's stake remained. He was dealt with last. Then the rake collected the chip he had lost, deftly caught and pushed towards him the other two.

Was that a coincidence?

He staked again, this time three chips on a single number, to make the rhythm plain.

The comedy was played through as before.

"Messieurs et dames, faites vos jeux"

"Les jeux sont faites. Rien ne va plus"

"Le Zero"

Gary sighed and kept his eye on the fifteen francs on number three. Once again the croupier's rake flicked out, a prehensile thing, astonishingly tactile, like the tongue of an insect. Once again the stake remained, this time in company with other stakes. The croupier's finger paused for a moment, and touched the table. Gary did not know there was a bell beneath the cloth. After that brief pause the rake was busy again, licking, darting, tasting, assimilating. Gary's fifteen francs disappeared in space with a flick. He showed disap-

pointment on his face and stared at the croupier, trying to catch his eye But the croupier's eye would not be caught

"Messieurs et dames, faites vos jeux"

Gary took three more chips, put them all on the nearest square, pretended to hesitate, picked up the top one, cast his eye wonderingly about the table, and began to beat with it on the other two

A black-coated individual with an extremely well-shaven chin came and bent over the croupier from behind and stared down at his tie He did not appear to say anything, nor did the croupier The croupier gazed speculatively at the board

"Les jeux sont faites Rien ne vas plus"

The well-shaven one withdrew The wheel of fortune span The white ball raced and jumped

"Le Zero"

A little gasp ran round the table Two zeros running !

A light finger tapped three times on Gary's shoulder

"Pardon, monsieur," a voice whispered in his ear

"Yeah ?" said Gary, looking straight ahead

"Oiseaux de passage !" whispered the voice

"What ?" said Gary Little concentric circles of excitement chased each other all down him from the top of his head He looked over his shoulder

An English major with bright blue eyes accepted the stare as a rebuke for breathing too closely down his neck

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the major "Two zeros running, eh, by Jove ?"

"Did you say something just now ?" Gary asked

"Me, sir ?" said the major "No, sir ! Not a thing !"

Gary stared

"They keep it too darned hot in here," said Gary, suddenly "I'm off"

"I say, do you mind if I take your place ? Two zeros running !"

"Surely"

Gary struggled out,

The major struggled in

"Thanks awfully, old chap," said the major, putting twenty francs on zero

Gary went into sweet sunshine with a puzzled frown upon his face What was it that guy had said? He found himself crossing the road towards the musical-comedy policeman

"What's *oiseau*?" he demanded

"*Oiseau*?" repeated the policeman, with a shrug Then he waved his hand at a flight of pigeons wheeling above the roof of the casino, refugees from the pigeon-shooting on the lowest step of the *terrasses* "*Ceux sont des oiseaux*," said he

"Birds!" said Gary

"*Pardon, monsieur*?"

"Birds!"

"Beards!" repeated the policeman, carefully and delightedly, in the tones of one who is learning a lesson well

"Beards of passage!" Gary suggested, keeping a negligent watch on the man

He need not have watched The policeman went as white as a sheet, stiffened himself with a jerk, clicked his heels in military manner, and raised his white-gloved hand smartly to the salute

Gary examined the phenomenon with puzzled interest

"What's it all *about*, anyway?"

The policeman remained rigidly frozen at the salute

"O K," said Gary "I'll find out somehow," and left him, still saluting with concentrated ferocity

On the far side of the square the white umbrellas and the marble tables of the Café de France invited him to lunch He knew that he was hungry, and also that he was very dirty and very tired He picked his way pleasantly across the gardens in the fretted shadow of the palm trees between the orderly regimentations of the flower-beds

The place looked comfortable. Indeed, the washing arrangements were superb. In fact, the standard of luxury was such that the professional presence in the gentlemen's lavatory of a black-gowned and distinctly beautiful young lady with a rope of pearls afforded him some temporary qualms before he decided that, in the matter of perfect taste, it was impossible that the good people of Monte Cristo had something there. With his hair sleeked down and a pungent aroma of synthetic flowers exuding rather noticeably from his person, he left the place feeling a new man, and took up a position of expectancy at one of the tables in the sunshine.

A little waiter came and smote the surface of the table busily with his napkin.

"Some lobster, sair?"

"Ah!" Gary exclaimed. "Spik English? No?"

"You betcha, sair! Or some very nice *poulet*? A nice wing of *poulet*. Very good, sair. Very nice bird." He moved the mustard-pot, the pepper-pot and the salt-pot in the now inevitable rhythm.

"Talking of birds," said Gary, "that's a swell idea! How about a nice bird of passage?"

The waiter went so pale that his eyes seemed black. He swallowed. "Yes, monsieur."

"What d'you mean, 'Yes'?"

The waiter swallowed again. It was obvious that he was in the grip of strong emotion. "Yes, monsieur," he repeated, in the accents of one going courageously to his death.

"God darn it!" exclaimed Gary. "What the hell is all this?"

The waiter seemed to emerge from a trance. He stared at Gary. For a moment he panicked, then he bent down and whispered. "You said 'Birds of passage,' monsieur?"

"All right, I said it! What the heck? What's gotten into this town? Have the inhabitants gone

plum crazy? What the hell are you yammering about? What I want to know is, what's it *mean*?"

The waiter was very serious about it indeed "You do not *know*, monsieur?"

"No! But, by golly, I'm going to find out!"

The waiter nodded faintly "*Monsieur is going to find out!*" He nodded again. He swayed. He swayed in a complete semicircle which took him helter-skelter into excited conference with three other waiters busy about an *hors-d'œuvre* trolley on wheels. He distributed the bad news with a wealth of gestication and many nervous glances over his shoulder.

The other waiters glanced too. They did more than that. They glowered. If the attitude of a waiter could possibly have been described as menacing these men threatened him.

Gary banged exasperatedly on the table with a spoon, keeping up the rhythm. "Where's the head waiter around this joint?" he demanded. "Doesn't a guy get any service around these parts? Help! Waiter! Maestro!"

The *maitre d'hôtel* came running. It was plain that the man was seriously alarmed.

"*Monsieur à commandé?*"

"Certainly. I've commanded! I've commanded with clearness and precision, and the guy goes nuts!"

"Some nuts, monsieur?"

"Forget it. Not that kind of nuts. Now listen carefully. What I want is—a *nice wing of a bird of passage!*"

The head waiter started as if he had been shot. The man was trembling.

Gary stared at the exhibition, fascinated.

"Excuse me, sir." The head waiter mustered a bow and hurried away as fast as his legs would carry him to join the conclave with the rest.

For some minutes Gary kept a wary, puzzled, half-amused eye upon them as they bent their heads

together and tapped their fingers forcefully on one another's shoulders. Then the head waiter detached himself to a little distance from the rest. He seemed doubtful. It seemed that the others were urging him on. At length he lifted his arms with a few inches of resignation from his sides, straightened his tie, pulled down his waistcoat and advanced upon Gary magisterially. When he arrived he stood behind Gary's chair, gripped the back of it, and tilted it forward about an inch.

"Excuse me, sir," he said firmly.

"*What the Hades are you doing with my chair?*"

"I am sorry, sir, but I am afraid you are *persona non grata* in Monte Cristo."

"'Struth!'" said Gary, bursting into the Oxford vernacular. "And strike me pink! You mean you want me to get out?"

"I am sorry, sir, there is no lunch."

Gary waved his hand at a hundred busy lunchers. "What are all these people doing?"

"I am sorry, sir," repeated the waiter, tilting the chair, on this occasion, so far from the horizontal that Gary was forced to make a grab at the table to save himself, and sent a fork and two spoons ringing on to the pavement. He scrambled to his feet in an ungainly and ridiculous manner and faced the waiter while the other guests in the establishment craned their necks at the sudden disturbance. The waiter's face was worse than white. It was a pale, dirty yellow. Gary stared at him in absolute astonishment. The tableau was posed thus for a few seconds, and then because there seemed nothing else to do in the circumstances, he stooped slowly to pick up his hat from another chair.

"*You will please go!*" said the head waiter, in the last extremity of emotional stress.

"O-Kay!" said Gary with sudden, noisy argumentativeness. "You might at least give me time to reach for my hat."

He crammed it on his head, and, feeling furious and a perfect fool, he left the place, completely bewildered and with the scared sensation of crawling about on a floating mine, any one of whose horns might, if innocently touched, set some hellish mechanism to work, with highly unpleasant results to everybody concerned.

He hurried northwards. He found a little unpretentious place and, avoiding anything which might be construed as longs and shorts or a reference to the birds of the air as he would the plague, he lunched satisfactorily if toughly off fried Mediterranean fish and undercooked potatoes.

But if Gary avoided these dangerous and unhealthy subjects, the proprietor, the waiters and the other patrons of the establishment were deeply implicated. Not once, but a hundred times, amid the clatter of the place, spoons and forks were slapped upon tables, trays were banged, change was given, men tapped with their feet, all beating out that maddening, monotonous tattoo. The most noticeable peculiarity which forced itself upon Gary in connection with this mysterious business was the look of fear which it evoked, quite plainly, on the faces of the people. Gary admitted to himself that this puzzled him a lot. It was more extraordinary than the cryptic meaning of the words themselves. Quite clearly the rhythmic knock was a sign by which the revolutionaries recognized each other, like the handclasp of Freemasons or the Stuart limp. Clearly, too, that whispered phrase about the *oiseaux de passage* was more than a mere password. It conveyed a message. It conveyed, if he was any judge of expression, a tremendous, terrifying message.

This, absurdly enough, was in deadly earnest. It was serious. The people were afraid. He, too, was afraid, for Stephanie, but then fear was more poignant than his, and by that measure all the more surprising. It baffled him. What was there to be afraid of, except that which they would bring upon themselves?

When he had eaten lunch it was three o'clock and in an hour the sun would have gone to bed behind that great mountain called "The Head of the Cat", whose premature casting of the twilight was the one thing, in happier times, in which M. Reynaud would have admitted Monte Cristo to be inferior to the rival resorts of the neighbouring French coast.

Gary strolled ruminatively down the hill again to the Casino gardens, and, selecting a patch of sunlight, sat in it to smoke a cigarette.

He was getting nowhere. He was like that crazy Lancashire comedian who, in the only English pantomime Gary had ever seen in his life, roused unseemly uproar among the children by running frantically, with a great many parcels, after something which purported to be an omnibus, on a revolving strip of stage. The picture was not flattering to Mrs. Williams' little boy. In a mad, almost unbelievable, six weeks, he had rushed hither and thither with restless energy, with an almost comic frenzy of enthusiasm, and where was he? No place at all! He was sitting in a patch of sunlight against an exotic background of palms and terraced hotels rising tier upon tier, as artificial a scene as ever graced a back-drop for the chorus—until you raised your eyes to the stark and preposterously undeniable mountains.

Somewhere in this silly, attractive little town, the play city of Europe, a population of parasites—a tiny nation of folks who lived their lives in subservience to the very rich—plotted a revolution. Could you beat that? Was there ever a more fantastic set-up for tragedy? Waiters, doormen, croupiers, policemen, taxi-drivers, flunkies, chauffeurs, chefs, coiffeurs, manicurists, experts in orchids and perfumery and décolletage! What a pack of blood-thirsty revolutionaries! He laughed, without extracting much of the humour of the situation till a thought struck him.

"Maybe!" he exclaimed softly aloud Maybe they knew their own unsuitability Maybe they were afraid of their duty as they saw it Maybe they didn't want to leave their cafe tables and their gilded salons and their elegant shops to rush through the streets, to shout, to kill, to plunder and to die Yellow, eh? The rats! The lily-livered, craven-hearted swine! He'd show them! By God, he'd——

A motor-horn whipped through the solitude with the revolutionary cry

He sat down again It was no use getting het up about this No use at all And yet somehow he *must* find that kid who was responsible for it, who had started all of this, who was somewhere, he knew, almost in touch of where he sat! How to find Stephane? How, how, *how*? Stop one of these guys, give him the signal, and ask? He'd run a mile! Within touch of where he sat? But was she? But *was* she? He stood up slowly, with the dawn of conviction on his face "Oh boy, oh boy!" he whispered "I believe you've hit it Yes, sir, I believe you're right Come to think of it, I know darned *well* you're right Oh boy, oh boy, oh *boy*!"

He darted with mounting excitement to the ornamental kiosk where for a sufficiency of francs one might buy a bus ticket for any part of the coast

"*Nice*!" said Gary "*Nice*! And make it snappy!"

He took a place in the bus with a sense of utter certainty Fool that he was, he had forgotten where he met her first Harry's Plage! *Nice*! Last time, was she in Monte Cristo? No, sir! She was right on the Promenade des Anglais at Nice! He kicked himself for a fool and sat grinning happily out of the window as the rising road took him above the tops of the tall chimneys of the famous brewery where Prince Paul's grandmother first cultivated those tastes which reappeared so remarkably through the miracle of heredity

It is not a long journey to Nice and most of it is advertisements "*Bouillon Kub*" "*Montres Lip*" "*Dub—Dubon—Dubonnet*" "*Visitez Cannes Son Casino Ses Fleurs*" "*Bouillon Kub*" "*Savon Cadum*" "*Montres Lip*" "*Dub—Dubon—Dubonnet*" "*Le Chateau de Madrid Son Chef*" "*Savon Cadum*" "*Montres Lip*" "*Dub—Dubon*" They set him down before the statue of Queen Victoria, who watches, so the locals say, to be sure that the skirts of the ladies are not too short

Nice Well—here he was! He stood in bright sunshine on the familiar pavement, for there is no "Head of the Cat" in Nice Nor for the matter of that was there any shadow of the revolution He noticed the absence of it immediately, with something like dismay The good *Niçois* were cheerfully indifferent to the troubles of their neighbouring principality He banged, *umtiddy, umtiddy*, on the blue iron railings with his ring, and no one heard He even danced a few steps like a tap dancer on the pavement, and nobody took the slightest notice This was disconcerting, in its way Was he on the wrong track still? He was not sure that for detective purposes it wasn't even worse than the pervading sense of immanence in Monte Cristo Still, he started forth with a certain lightness of heart to walk along the seven kilometres of front which curved away to where the black molars of the Esterel mountains waited in sinister certainty for their nightly devouring of the sun

His lightness of heart did not endure With every step he took he felt that he was getting colder What the hell, boys! What the hell! Why walk out into the west like this? Why revisit the scenes of that fortnight's holiday? Why walk even so far as Harry's Plage, whose yellow fence he could just pick out in the distance about a mile away? Was there any sense in it? Was that the way to find someone whose supporters tapped to one another in Monte Cristo? He

was walking rapidly into Suburbia. By the time he had passed the livid, liver-coloured roof of the Hôtel Negresco he knew that he was walking in the wrong direction.

He could have sat on the beach and howled. How *did* one go about locating a person who might be anywhere within thirty miles of coast? How did these detective guys go about the business of trailing a quarry? Did they go for walks in the sunshine? Did they watch the railway stations? Check the arrival and departure of buses? The job seemed hopeless anyway. He didn't know where she stayed. He didn't even know her name. Was she always Mademoiselle Dubois? He knew darned well there were as many Mademoiselles Dubois in Nice as there were Miss Smiths in Vassar. Whom could he ask? He was downright discouraged. He spent some time leaning forward with his forearms on the railings, bending over, with a loose lock of hair, to stare meditatively at his shoes, and some time leaning back, with his elbows on the railings and one foot on one of the rungs, staring meditatively at the sky. Then he sighed helplessly through his nose, and walked disconsolately to the Scotch Tea Rooms, where he sat moodily munching a toasted scone and watching a famous English author with a lady who was indubitably not his wife. Then he took the bus back to Monte Cristo.

He dined that night in solitary splendour in the Hôtel de France. In that august hostelry the signal of the birds was politely subdued out of deference to the guests, but still omnipresent. The tightly waisted, smooth-cheeked reception clerk was tapping it with a key, his eyes elaborately unfocused, as Gary went in. More delicately still, the elegant who presided over the illuminated showcases of pearls, cigarette-lighters, gentlemen's cuff-links, ladies' gold-backed brushes, diamond clasps, and such other last-minute objects as *les clients* might have carelessly forgotten to pack,

tapped it on his finger-nail. The waiters, swirling and eddying deftly with uplifted trays of cocktails, contented themselves with the merest suspicion of the metre as they set glasses down softly upon the tables. The head waiter in the restaurant was no party to the scheme, but the slim creature who took his order made the gesture with a pencil in his note-book, and the *sommelier* with three pieces of ice in his whisky-and-soda. It was not until after dinner as he sat in the lounge, curled in his ungainly way around a cup of coffee, that he became gradually aware of that same feeling of electricity in the air which had first affected him that morning in the Casino.

It is difficult to explain exactly what it was that made Gary lift his head suddenly like an animal which catches something on the wind. He looked sharply about him. In the lounge everything was normal. To his right two Japanese gentlemen sat opposite to each other at another table, reading. A little further off an English party, with bucolic faces and boiled shirt-fronts, clustered heads round one of their number who was telling a story, and then burst asunder into too hearty laughter. Two remarkably *signée*, grey-haired ladies with aristocratic faces came together out of the restaurant, drew their shawls about them, entered the lift, and went down in it. Just outside the revolving-door the negro commissioner was brushing his cap against his sleeve with the regular motion of a cat licking itself. The two reception clerks stood impassively behind their counter. A lady employee, with a sheaf of papers in her hand, a pleasant face and extremely good ankles, came out of one side-door and went in at another. The lift-boy reappeared with his lift, flung open the door and leant against it, holding his white-gloved hands. A waiter hurried in with a vast bottle of brandy and served the English milords.

What *was* it? The scene seemed orderly enough, and yet he was certain that something was afoot

He felt it in his bones He knew it in the tingling of his nerves, in the faster motion of his heart He frowned and looked out into the square Everything was as usual From the far side came the muted, tinkling melodies of the Hungarian orchestra in the Café de France The floodlit Casino, with its entrances and its pinnacles picked out in blue neon tubes, shed a blanket of radiance over the square cobblestones and put perhaps overmuch sparkle into the already ostentatious cars which circled slowly up to the base of the broad white steps Was anything abnormal in all of this ?

What was it ? Was it more than ordinary assumption of aimlessness ? Were there, or were there not, more people than usual standing about in the square with apparently nothing to do ? Was the prolonged concentration of the negro porter on the specklessness of his cap a deliberate pretence ? Were the two reception clerks standing about looking consciously innocent ? Gary stared fixedly at them Was the waiter, standing like a graven thing with his pale face lifted a little and his eyes gazing with extraordinary intentness upon the ceiling, really interested in the ceiling ? Was the lift-boy genuinely fascinated by his boots ? Was it possible that the expressions on the faces of these people were remarkably like the expressions on the faces of schoolboys who are keeping cave while some of their number, all invisible, are engaged upon some deeply mysterious act ? He thought it was He shifted uneasily in his chair

There was something very odd about that music He stubbed out his cigarette and strained his ears to catch it Was that the "*Salut d'Amour*" which he used to scrape on the violin at school ? It was With a subtle shift —

His eyes brightened He gripped the arms of his chair

Gosh ! The rhythm !

He stood up so suddenly that the small table with coffee on it crashed to the ground. The waiter who was so intent upon the ceiling recollected himself with a sigh, advanced with a reassuring smile, bowed perfectly and collected the debris. Neither the lift-boy nor the two men behind the reception desk had moved a muscle.

This was extraordinary. Could it really be that that darned music——

He stalked one of the reception clerks, advancing warily. He leaned against the counter.

"Nice tune they're playing," said Gary, elaborately casual.

"*Oui, monsieur*."

"Yeah !"

The reception clerk took a marked interest in the condition of his nails.

"It certainly is a swell tune !"

"*Oui, monsieur*."

"Yeah !"

"*Vous desirez quelque-chose, monsieur ?*"

"Yeah," said Gary. "I know the answer to that one. *Je desire Mademoiselle Dubois*."

The reception clerk should have been an ambassador.

"*Bonne chance, monsieur*," he murmured with a little smile.

"Thanks, pal," said Gary slowly, with suspicion turning into certainty.

He turned as a party of four, an elderly man and woman, a remarkably pretty girl, obviously their daughter, and a younger man, came out from the restaurant. They went towards the lift. The lift-boy jumped to attention and saluted. He ushered them in and clanged the gate. The lift went down. The lifts at this hotel went down, it seemed, instead of up. It was the second time Gary had seen that happen, but the first time he had noticed it.

"Where are they going?" he asked, innocently

"*Au Casino, monsieur*"

"But the Casino's right across the square——"

The clerk shrugged "*Il-y-a un passage souterrain, monsieur*"

"What? Say that again"

"*Un passage souterrain, monsieur*"

Gary's eyes narrowed, and he gripped the brass rail at the edge of the desk

"Oh yeah? A passage, eh?"

"*Au Casino, monsieur*"

"Well, well, well! Is that so? Now, isn't that convenient? Say, they think of everything around here I think I'll go that way myself"

The reception clerk's manners were really much better than Gary's

"*C'est dommage, monsieur, mais il faut absolument la tenue de soirée* The evening dress is *obligatoire au Casino*"

"Say, isn't that just too bad!" exclaimed Gary, drumming with his fingers on the rail "And me one of the hired assassins of the *Société des Bains de Mer*!" He nodded to the clerk and strode towards the lift The lift-boy saluted

"*Quelle étage, monsieur?*"

"Passage," said Gary

The lift-boy looked doubtfully at his tweed suit

"Okay, Okay!" Gary reassured him in a fatherly manner "I'm one of these birds of passage"

The lift-boy paled and stood so stiffly that he quivered

"*Oiseaux de passage, monsieur?*"

"Sure! Sure! Come on, now Let's get going!"

"*Bien, monsieur*"

The gates clanged The folding door flicked into position They went down one floor

"*Voulez-vous, monsieur?*"

"Thanks," said Gary He stepped out and detect-

ing a temptation to linger, waved the boy away with his hand "Beat it, will you!"

"Bien, monsieur Au revoir, monsieur"

The lift ascended into heaven

It was a very luxurious passage as passages went Its walls were panelled and painted, a rich purple carpet ran along the floor, and it was lit by wall sconces in the form of Egyptian ladies with prominent busts An oval French print in a gilt frame hung in the middle of each panel, and at the far end, about eighty yards away, was the curved handrail of a staircase ending with the bronze figure of a boy holding aloft an electric torch

Gary tiptoed cautiously towards this place, and found himself at last within the sound of many voices, which reached him with that blurring of resonance and reverberation which spoke clearly of a large number of people in a great hall Up there was the Casino As he listened, in a sweat of excitement, he could actually hear, among the hubbub, the cry of the croupiers and a voice, astonishingly close, so that its owner must have been standing at the head of the stairs, said "*Maximum, dix francs, madame*"

Suddenly two fresh voices made him flatten himself quickly against the wall of the well of the staircase The sound of these voices was coming to him along the passage! He heard them talking gruffly to each other in French, after beginning abruptly in mid-sentence Then he heard the gates of the lift clang twice, and the faint whine as it departed The voices, speaking earnestly together, came gradually closer He waited, straining his ears to catch the words, and wondering what audacity of his could carry off the situation of their discovery of a young American doing his utmost to become invisible in full view of anyone who prepared to use the staircase He flattened himself still further He could hear the voices droning on, in chesty whispers now The passage was long, but the conversation was

curiously longer What the heck? Oh, sure! He guessed that they had stopped He guessed that they were standing talking to each other, and his imagination pictured them, from the sounds they made, as little men with black hair *en brosse* and Monte Cristo moustaches, and plump dinner-jacketed figures He would have given anything to look, but dared not take the risk The conversation ebbed now It became spasmodic, irreconcilable, ruminative, and full of gaps for shrug and gesture Then he caught one word It was "*Enfin!*" and it was uttered with that air of worried resignation which does in fact mark the end of a conversation which can have no end Then silence

Gary waited, without breathing The suspense was telling He imagined them staring at their boots, staring at each other, holding a worried silence together now, rather than worried words His heart leapt Perhaps they would go back! He hadn't finished with this passage yet Perhaps they would alter their minds and go up in the elevator Perhaps he wouldn't be discovered yet

The silence lasted It had lasted now for a surprising time What were they doing? Dare he look? Better not He looked

The passage was quite empty

At first Gary disbelieved this He would have heard the elevator He swore to himself surely that if he had heard the elevator come once he must have heard it come a second time He ventured out and stood in the middle of the carpet, staring down the passage There was no doubt about it He was the only person present

There was something unpleasantly supernatural about this Two gentlemen of Monte Cristo in dinner-jackets could not simply disappear Then the chances were He began to advance cautiously down the carpet

The door was quite obvious when he came upon it

It was not even a secret door. It was simply a door of that typically French pattern which you may discover anywhere in France, from the Palace of Versailles to the humblest *pension*, and which takes its place in the scheme of wall decoration, not as an entity of its own, but as the untidy corner of one panel and the moulding of the next which can conveniently be opened. There was no handle, but there was a large keyhole in which, unfortunately, reposed no key.

He pushed it gently with the tips of his fingers, keeping wary eyes and ears. It did not budge. He pulled a Yale key out of his pocket, wedged the tip of it gently in the keyhole and pulled. That was no use either. The damned, blankety door was locked! Wait a minute, though! He poised the knuckles of his hand, and then knocked distinctly, tap—tap—tap.

Nothing happened.

Well. This was clearly another case where he put his weight against it.

It was a noisy business, but at the fifth attempt there was a loud splintering and tearing, and the mortice came adrift. A few gentle pressings and easings—and the door opened into darkness.

He entered cautiously, stumbled down three stone steps, and closed the door behind him. The blackness was intense. He fumbled for a matchbox, and found one match with his finger-tips. He struck it. It seemed to find difficulty in burning in the frowsty air, and vouchsafed only a few brief glimpses of a long stone passage with pipes and cables running along the wall before it flickered out. He cursed silently, and took a few gingerly paces forward, only to trip with an indescribable racket over an empty fire-pail. The sound clattered and banged through the hollow vaults with a noise to awaken the dead. He stood waiting for it to finish, scarcely daring to breathe. But if the dead were present none was awakened. The echoes settled down again into the silence of a tomb. After

an interval he started forth again, walking with arms outstretched, so that his hands could flutter the wall on either side, and carefully advancing each foot before he put his weight upon it. The way seemed interminable. For at least five minutes he felt his way forward, and though his eyes must have been accustomed by now to the faintest hint of light, the darkness was as impenetrable as ever. He reckoned that he must have come about two hundred yards, and still the passage led on at a gently descending level. He stopped for a moment to look at his watch, which glowed brightly phosphorescent. Nearly half past ten. As he put his hand back in his pocket a noise startled him. It was a little scuffling noise. He waited tensely. Everything was very silent.

"*Hullo*," he whispered.

"*Hullo*," a whisper answered back.

"*Who's there?*" he asked.

"*Who's there?*" the answer came.

"*God darn it!*" said Gary.

"*God darn it!*" agreed the echo.

Gary decided to keep himself to himself in the darkness. After a pause to recover his courage, he started forth again.

He must have gone another hundred yards when a faint luminosity appeared ahead, deceptively at first, and then, as he stole towards it, as distinct outline of the passage, a long way off, surrounded by a frame of black, as if he looked down the wrong end of a telescope. He quickened his pace, and, as he drew nearer to the light, he could see that it came from some kind of recess on one side of the passage and lit up the stone wall, which brought it to an abrupt end. He stumbled the last thirty yards in an ungainly sprint.

There was an iron door on the right which felt, when he fingered it, like the emergency exit from a theatre. A sharp shaft of light showed beneath, and from the other side came a confused whisper of voices. He

smiled to himself, squared his shoulders, took a deep breath, and banged authoritatively on it the revolutionary code. There was a loud clang as the bar was pushed, the door swung open in two halves, and Gary stepped into a haze of light. He flicked his fingers from his right temple in salute.

"Howya, folks!" said Gary genially.

In the confused tangle of impressions which crowded upon Gary at that instant it is not easy to chronicle any sort of order. The place was an aquarium. Its black walls seemed to blaze at regular rectangular intervals with illuminated tanks containing every known grotesque, beautiful, and impossible variety of fish, from armoured crabs lazily mounting one another's backs, to cascading shoals of little pink creatures which seemed to move like ballet dancers, with the flutter of tiny fans. There was a door marked in large white letters "*Sortie*", and in the centre of the room, illuminated like the rest and set upon a table, a gigantic octopus heaved with slow convulsions in the corner of its tank. The light shed by these submarine specimens was in constant movement, and it fell with a queer suggestion of rippling unreality on the humdrum figures of a dozen men or so with watery shirt-fronts, posed in a semi-circle of arrested amazement. It fell also on the figure of a girl in white evening dress.

"Oh, hello, Steph!" he said.

"You!" she exclaimed.

He grinned.

"The 'You melodramatic'! How did I get in? Oh, I just bust open the door and walked. What am I doing in Monte Cristo? Oh, just keeping an eye on you. Well, boys, how's everything going?"

His effrontery seemed to render them speechless.

"Nice place you've got here," remarked Gary,

looking round "What's the name of the guy in the middle?"

His garrulity did something to galvanize the revolutionaries. In an abrupt concerted movement they crowded round at chest level, not grimly, in the Anglo-Saxon manner, but with a shrill, gesticulating ferocity which in its way was just as ugly. He could not understand what they said, but when they tried to manhandle him towards the door he dug his feet into the ground. The room was filled with panting, grunting and the sounds of struggle.

"Now, now, boys! Take it easy! Hey there, Alphonse! Take your face out of my chest, will ya? Boys! Boys! *I'm on your side!* Easy now, or I shall get annoyed! Say, Steph, will you call off the bloodhounds?" He struggled, with his arms thrust stiffly against the jambs of the door. "Stephanie!"

"*Un moment,*" ordered Stephanie, and then more sharply "*Monsieur André! Monsieur Dupont! Laissez-le, s'il vous plaît! Monsieur Rosand!*"

"There you are, boys," said Gary, elbowing them off and straightening his collar. "Her Hereditary Highness has spoken! Listen, Steph, can I be any help?"

She faced him severely, but there was, he thought, an almost imperceptible flash of amusement behind the accusation in her eyes.

"*Eh bien, Monsieur Williams* You will please tell us why you have come here?"

"Well," said Gary modestly, still busy with his tie. "You know me. I'm one of these persistent guys."

"I think also that you are one of these very interfering guys!"

"Now, now, Your Highness. You've got me wrong."

"I repeat," said Stephanie. "*Why have you come here?*"

"Okay," admitted Gary grudgingly. "If you must have it—I'm looking for a Mrs. Williams."

She laughed, not altogether scornfully

"Also I think you're running your head into a noose here, and I kind of—thought I'd—like to stick around "

A growing murmur rose suddenly, but the Princess silenced it with her hand

"A noose ? What is this noose ?"

He addressed himself to her directly, behind his assumption of banter

"Steph, *can't* you cut it out ? Can't you come down to earth for *one* moment ? You haven't got a dog's chance ! The people are getting yellow ! They go round tapping at one another all the day, but they don't like it ! I'm telling you ! And now that the marriage is—how shall we say ?—postponed——"

"You *know* this ?"

"Oh, sure ! I know everything I'm a natural born spy "

Did she hesitate ? He carried on, more earnestly than ever

"Listen, Stephanie Will you do me a favour, and call it off ? All this secret signs, and *oiseaux de passage*, and sneaking around in the dark, and meeting in the aquarium after hours, it's—it's—darn it, it's early pre-war ! Besides, it's dangerous You'll get hurt I don't *want* you to get hurt Stephanie, for God's sake, *be yourself* !"

The Princess Stephanie smiled He did not like the look of that smile There was something unreasonable, something too self-confident, something almost fanatical about it

"You must not be led astray by melodrama," she told him quietly "This is a very safe place in which we meet For two years we have held our meetings here There are three ways in, and three ways out The sign"—she shrugged—"is useful for the people It helps them to recognize their friends It gives one courage—to recognize one's friends" She looked at him very straight in the eye as she said this "I am

sorry, *mon ami*, but I do not draw back now I have a duty to my people ”

Gary made a little gesture of resignation

“O K , my dear,” he said very quietly “Then I’m with you ”

She faltered

“You are *with* us ?”

“I tell you,” he said angrily, “that I’ll stick around somehow ! If I can’t stop you starting this comic revolution, then you can count me in ! *Up the Revolution !*”

Immediate tumult arose A few moments later a rather sleek individual advanced himself from the throng politely and constituted himself spokesman

“Monsieur, I speak a little English I have listened with great attention to what you have to say I fancy, monsieur, that we shall know how to deal with you if you wish to make trouble ”

“Fair enough,” admitted Gary

“Thank you, monsieur At the same time—there were one or two nuances in your remarks which excite, I think, a certain sympathy and understanding You must be—am I not right ?—the Monsieur Gary Williams lately in the employ of the proprietor of the Royal Palace Hotel ?”

“Yes, but I——”

“We know that, monsieur ”

Gary looked at Stephanie “Oh, you do !”

Stephanie looked just over his head

“You made some allusion, monsieur, to a search for a Mrs Williams ”

Gary blushed “Sure ! I’m crazy about her If you like your English pure, I love her *What’s so funny about that ?*”

“Nothing, monsieur ” He bowed to the Princess “It is altogether intelligible Here we are citizens of Monte Cristo, monsieur But we are also French It is this which excites our sympathy Would it be

considered an impertinence if we made a request for some circumstantial evidence which might go some way to show—forgive me, monsieur—that you may genuinely be trusted ?”

“Well, after all,” Gary said, “I walked in here ”

“That was very easy, monsieur ”

“Oh, you think so ? Supposing you’d shot me up !”

“Ah no, monsieur We are not armed ”

Gary stared “D’you mean to say you haven’t got guns ?”

“But certainly not, monsieur! We are entirely civilized people That is—unless M Rostand ”

“I ’ave,” confessed Monsieur Rostand guiltily, “but zere is nozzing in it ” He pulled out an old-fashioned revolver and opened the back to demonstrate

“My God !” said Gary, amazed “You mean to say you’re running a revolution and you haven’t got guns ?”

M André hesitated

“There is a small stack of rifles which belonged to the Army Do you think we should have more ?”

Gary tore his hair in a dramatic gesture of desperation

“You’re crazy !” he cried “You’re up against a guy who doesn’t stick at murder, and you say ‘*Should we have more guns*’ ”

He spoke with a fine, oratorical scorn

“Murder ?”—M André looked patronizing “Ah, no !”

“Certainly !”

“Not, *Monsieur Reynaud C’est de la folie* !”

“But I tell you he did ! Three times ! I saw it with my own eyes !”

“Ah, no !” said M André

“You’re hopeless !” exclaimed Gary “I tell you he tried to run down the Princess here, with a big car, right outside the door of her apartment ! I saw him do it ! And you say ‘*Should we have more guns*’ ? When that failed, what did he do ? Sent a little runt

disguised as a carpenter to saw through the strands of the elevator rope! And you say '*Should we have more guns?*' When the Princess stayed home he sent the same guy to fix up some kind of a death-trap with the awning over the sidewalk! And you say '*Should we have more guns?*' He hired me, didn't he? I tell you that rat would stick at nothing! Do you know *why* the wedding was postponed? Why did this Prince Paul suddenly decide he didn't want to be a Prince, and keep right on driving his taxi? Because he hired another thug—a senator this time—to smash up his machine for him in the streets of Paris That's why! And you say, '*Should we have more guns?*' *Should we have more guns!* I ask you" He raised one finger in the air His voice echoed dramatically The echoes died away

M. André sighed and recovered his poise

"We admit your sincerity, monsieur, and we thrill to your eloquence Before we proceed we may as well now admit the third little matter which excited our sympathy in your previous oration I refer, monsieur, to your efforts to persuade Her Hereditary Highness not to proceed further with the revolution At the time of your unexpected entry, monsieur, we had arrived, by the same thought process, at the same conclusion"

He turned to the Princess

"The moment, *Altesse Hereditaire*, is past By the day after tomorrow the fact that the marriage has not taken place will be in the newspapers The peculiar appeal of the joint claim to the restoration will not apply *Altesse*, it is too late"

"Not yet," said Gary softly

"Monsieur?"

"I said *not yet!*" repeated Gary

"But, monsieur!"

"Listen," said Gary tensely "Maybe I don't have the same experience of revolutions as you, but all

the same I know this *You're got to strike while the iron's hot!* You're got to seize the psychological moment! If *you'll* tell *me* what time the Paris newspapers arrive the day after tomorrow, *I'll* tell *you* when's the psychological moment!"

"But, monsieur!"

Gary shouted "*What time do the newspapers arrive?*"

"The Paris newspapers, monsieur, at noon. But the *Éclairreur de Nice* will receive the information by telephone. It is on sale here at eight o'clock."

"Fine!" said Gary, with an air of one who gains his point. "*Then the psychological moment is any time before eight o'clock the day after tomorrow.*"

He surveyed them triumphantly.

A sudden clamour arose at his words. The revolutionary deputies crowded round Monsieur André, demanding a translation of what had occurred. M. André gave them a rapid *précis*, and addressed himself once more to Gary, who stood with that little nervous pulse fluctuating in his temple.

"This is interesting, monsieur. Pray continue."

"Well, *darn* it all, gentlemen!" exclaimed Gary. "Don't you see it's your only chance? The people here are all working themselves up for a revolution, twittering about birds and getting themselves into such a state of nerves that if you put off the darned thing much longer they'll either get too yellow to revolt or else it'll fall flat out of a sure sense of anticlimax! I tell you, if you're *going* to do it, you've got to do it *now*! You've got to do it the day after tomorrow! You've got to do it before the people crack! You've got to do it before they find out Prince Paul ratted on them! And what's more, you've got to do it while Reynaud and his bunch of gangsters think they're the only people who know about the marriage except ourselves—think we're deciding the game's up and are off their guard! *I'll* tell you what

you've got to do ! You've got to get word round to everybody to hold themselves in readiness to watch for the sign ! Now !"

"It is already round," said M Andre calmly

"It is ?"

"Certainly," said M André "*Les oiseaux de passage*"

"That's great ! But you've not only got to get them ready, you've got to get 'em willing ! You've got to keep their courage up ! And what's more, you've got to get them armed And what's more, every man Jack of the population of this principality has got to know exactly when the signal's going to go off, and exactly what he's going to do when he gets it You can't just have the population rushing around in the streets You've got to have *organization* ! You've got to have a post for every man And every man at his post You've got to have an objective for every man ! And every man's got to get his objective or bust in the attempt You've got to have a hundred men for the Casino And a hundred men for the *Bains de Mer* offices And two hundred more for the Palace Hotel And they've got to swoop down on those places, letting off their guns good and plenty You've got to make a *job* of it You've got to get that gang of crooks so God-almighty scared they'll sign anything you put before 'em And you've got to give each of 'em something to sign, all typed out ready You've got to crash the manager's office of the Palace Hotel with twenty picked men with guns, and you've got to slap a document on the desk abdicating all his rights and messages, and say, 'Sign that, you—if you don't want a bullet in your belly !'"

"The army ?" suggested M André

"Fine !" Gary agreed "Give the thing an official flavour ! You've got to get the police station And the railway station ! And—is there a radio station here ?"

"*Radio Monte Cristo ! Our, our !*"

"Get it," said Gary "Twenty men Sign up the manager on the dotted line and take him away to prison Do they keep a prison here ?"

"No," said M André "We deport them "

"Good enough Put 'em over the frontier and tell 'em to start walking and keep walking Steph, is that royal barge of yours in Cannes ?"

She nodded

"Well, get off to her now You've got just about thirty hours "

M André cleared his throat "And—er—if one might ask—when does all this take place ?"

"Sure," agreed Gary "If there's anything else you want to know, just ask That's what I'm here for " He looked round "The revolution starts at dawn, Wednesday "

"Dawn !"

Gary looked at him "Any objections ?"

"Is it necessary to begin quite so early ?"

"Certainly it is Every revolution begins at dawn !"

M André sighed With raised eyebrows he took a silent vote from his colleagues

"Very well," said M André miserably "At dawn "

Gary glared round the room, prognathous, dictatorial

"Okay, boys," he nodded "*Get going !*"—and came out by that same door wherein he went

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE NEXT DAY WAS ONE OF ALMOST CONTINUOUS AND frenzied activity

Gary had obtained for himself a room in a tall narrow hotel with a fantastic front and slab sides, two-thirds of the way up the hill towards the railway station. Steep steps, and steep streets, and more steep steps still, led down from it in an irregular cascade to the Casino gardens, and from its windows he could command a view of nearly all the town. It tumbled away below his balcony, which was a wishful thing, studded with bright-blue china knobs and blazing with bougainvillaea. Immediately beneath him was the Casino, much as he had seen it from the train. To the right was the circular building which housed the aquarium. Beyond that the flag still fluttered from the roof of the Palace Hotel. Beyond again was the harbour.

With the bed pushed sideways against the wall, and rickety cane chairs with lace antimacassars impounded from unoccupied rooms, the revolutionary committee sat there in constant, nervous, argumentative session. The antiquated telephone, with its mahogany wall-bracket and handle for arousing the exchange, shrilled unceasingly. A dozen times that day Gary clattered down the steps and busied himself at back premises, arranging volunteers for this and volunteers for that, and superintending the distribution of the guns. A dozen times he was hauled up the precipitous slope in the little cog-wheeled railway, and scrambled his way down to the hotel again, through five back gardens, from the station.

In the town itself, in spite of everything that Gary could do to prevent it, was an air of suppressed

excitement Men stood about in groups Waiters hovered outside cafés, looking up and down the street, as though they were expecting something Fat proprietors of shops stood in doorways watching At the entrances to hotels, concierges and commissionaires and collarless, striped-waistcoated porters grouped themselves with their backs to the world, muttered together with unmoving lips, and glanced anxiously over their shoulders Everywhere was this attitude of waiting and watching In the elegant windows of the Monte Cristo branches of Paris *coutouriers*, *chic* assistants with neat hair and flesh-coloured stockings stood, under some pretext of rearranging their wares, with their eyes keeping a curious lookout through the window

The service was execrable, that day, in the Café de France In the famous *pâtisserie* at the head of the square, where all the world collects in the morning for coffee and *éclairs* before it is time to move on to the Café de France for cocktails and cigarettes, the *clientèle* was distracted at the way madame and her good-looking girls were constantly going to the door to gaze, when they should have been attending briskly to their orders

In the famous establishment of Madelon across the way it was the same It was impossible to attract the attention of anybody at all At lunch that day, in the Hotel du Palais, the great restaurant was entirely without waiters for minutes at a time, and when threats of violence to the manager from the irate famous did produce them, they were hollow-cheeked and inattentive, and suffered furious rebukes with their minds fixed on something without the windows

It seemed indeed as if it were impossible for Monte Cristoans to remain indoors They crowded into the streets, a black-clad population, and peered into the distance If a hostile conqueror had been expected from afar, by air, by steam-vessel, by tank, or by white palfrey, they could not have kept an intenser, more

agitated watch, and when great *camions* thundered by, with grim-faced drivers and the undoubted camouflage of the name of some *boulangerie* or a *marchand de fleurs*, they craned their necks after them and followed them with their eyes in a "*Guns-that-was*" voicelessness of alarm

They were setting up Venetian masts in the Casino square. They arrived in lornes, those tall red affairs, top-knotted with the gilt arms of the Monte Cristo family, which the municipality keeps in readiness for those high days and holidays, those *fêtes de gala* which are so much the gayer for this decorative touch. It was M. André's idea, and though Gary argued with him palely and passionately, there they were, being eased by grunting men into their sockets, to provide the passer-by with something to gape at, and to suggest an air of festivity which was belied by the nervous dissociation of every man who knew what they foreboded.

There was no mistaking the fact that by that afternoon the subtle mood of agitation and expectancy had communicated itself to the visitors. They, too, began to stand about in groups, bewildered by this queer preoccupation of the inhabitants, stayed to watch the scenes of preparation with suspicious curiosity, and even caught the prevailing habit of reaching to see into the distance and asking each other apprehensively what it was that was expected to come.

That afternoon clouds came over the mountains. The day grew grey, and the chilly mistral blew. It struck all colour from the scene, and set the palm trees whispering and shivering together as though they, as well, chattered with anxiety. It cast an evil spell of monochrome over the sea, whipping it into pale breakers, and sending up the unaccustomed spray from the walls and bastions and breakwaters. It blew the umbrellas about outside the *Café de France*, and excited even the pigeons, throwing them angrily about

the air in whorls and loops There was an ochre aspect now in the sky, and "The Head of the Cat" shone with an eerie, other-worldly light, which descended upon it in parallel rays, as if even the gods aloft toyed with signs and portents

At four o'clock the storm broke, and the good people crossed themselves For an hour there had been the smell of icy sulphur in the streets Now, suddenly, forked lightning flicked viciously between bellying clouds and sea, and there was the hiss of rain The heavens clapped open with tremendous majesty, and the water fell upon the little town, dashing itself madly upon the roofs and the empty square, and gossiping in the gutters The lights began to appear in the Casino, in the café, in the hotel, in the distant palace, to shine on streets and steps and pavements washed clean of people

In the Café de France the Hungarian orchestra, looking sallow in the sulphuretted light, jingled their gipsy melodies to an empty floor The muted thunder banged and cavorted overhead In one corner three waiters, with hands behind their backs, formed a whispering triangle At one table near the floor the two professionals sat, the girl attending to her face unceasingly, the man staring vacantly out over the vacant floor

Outside, a solitary vehicle, drawn by a decrepit horse and driven by an aged gentleman of whom practically nothing was visible between the brim of his top hat and the upturned collar of his tarpaulin, plodded and splashed Its occupant, if occupant there was, was shrouded by an extension of the hood which enclosed the tonneau completely like a bell A violent explosion of thunder shook the air and vibrated the earth, but the old horse and the old cabby plodded on, too elderly, perhaps, to flee even from the wrath to come

At eight o'clock the darkness fell Gary, rattled,

exhausted, soaked, and alone at last, watched it settle from the window of his room, saw the red and green harbour lights wink suddenly to one another, saw the street-lamps flash on in sections as a man in another part of the town flicked ebony switches and gave Monte Cristo to the night. It was the night before the revolution.

Everything was arranged. M. André, as a member of the municipal government, had been accorded the honour of leading the party against the Casino. M. Rostand, with his revolver now supplied with shell, had been allotted Radio Monte Cristo. The others, after nerve-racking arguments, had accepted their appointed tasks. Each had a hundred men under him, of which one-fifth were armed with rifles. The army, consisting of thirty men, under the command of a general, had been assigned to the capture of the Royal Palace Hotel. The population had been warned of what to expect. A salute of twenty-one guns from the Royal Yacht at dawn. He himself had been among them for a large part of the day, pounding the streets, and muttering the words "*À l'Aube!*" to the people who waited on their doorsteps. He had bought a small pocket dictionary to ascertain that that was the word for "dawn."

"And keep your chins up!" he had added, for those who cared to understand.

"*À l'Aube! À l'Aube! À l'Aube!*" The message had gone whispering about the town, zigzagging up and down the streets like a Chinese cracker, leaving blanched faces in its wake. *À l'Aube!* It would not be long now, they told themselves. The zero hour approached. The waiting and the watching would soon be over. *À l'Aube!* Some of the women cried a little and hugged children to their aprons. Their menfolk brushed out their moustaches and seemed to acquire some spurious courage from the act. Those who received rifles received them hurriedly and thrust them

into the darkness of their doorways. They were of an old French Army type, with wicked-looking bayonets. His own was in the room with him, tucked beneath the bed. *À l'Aube!* It would not be long now. Twelve hours perhaps. Already the storm was sailing out to sea, and the thunder rumbled on the horizon.

Gary leaned far out over his balcony, and looked eastward, towards that point in space where the distant lights of Cannes hung suspended in the darkness. The rain had stopped, but everywhere was the sound of water, jumping and frolicking down to the sea, and the smell of the air was very sweet.

He did not notice the smell of the air. Restless with excitement and nervous exhaustion, he dodged in quickly after that one short look, and, drenched as he was about the shapeless shoulders of his coat, and with mud spattered and solidifying about his trouser-ends, he hurried out again, and went squelching down those interminable steps, for the thirteenth time that day.

Monte Cristo would not sleep much that night. Now it was the doorways which were lit, and the streets which were dark, but in every doorway of every street stood a man, or a woman, or a family, not talking to one another, but standing silently, as if they obtained some comfort from the simple sight of one another, and the sight of him, as he went splashing past. There was something a little uncanny about this silent scrutiny. The thought crossed his mind that it was rather like running through a town of Swiss weathercocks, of innumerable toy doorways, each with its little figure.

So he came again to the Casino Square. The masts were up now, linked by bedraggled chains of artificial flowers. The effect was incongruous, and yet fitted the universal scheme of expectation. Apart from those mute witnesses of things to come, the place seemed strangely normal—more normal, indeed, than he had seen it on the previous night. A little group of shirt-fronts and glowing cigar-ends passed the *entr'acte* of the

Opéra—it begins at six—in the open air The policeman, caped now against the rain, saluted him with an air of gravamen The parking-lights of the cars glowed steadily red about the railings The same old strains of the same old Hungarian orchestra filtered through the tightly fastened windows, and in silhouette against the intricately looped and gathered blinds, which you see only in rich hotels and everywhere in Monte Cristo, were the shapes of couples dancing The head waiter who had refused him lunch was standing in his doorway, saw him, looked the other way, and gave him a gruff good evening

Gary stopped for a moment and took an academic interest in the bill of fare

“Everything O K ?” he whispered

“Yes, sair ”

“O K Keep your chin up ! See you at dawn !”

He paced on, hands in pockets, shoulders hunched, damp coat-collar upturned

An electric bell clanged somewhere, and the smokers by the Opéra entrance bestirred themselves, sent cigar- and cigarette-ends chasing one another in faint parabolas, and crowded slowly through the door

Gary halted in the shadows to see the last of them safely in

The policeman came up quietly and stood beside him without a word

A chauffeur whispered suddenly, close to them, in the darkness

“Cor blimey !” said the chauffeur “‘Aven’t got much of a night for it, ‘ave they ?”

Gary turned his head, suddenly startled

“What for ?” he demanded under his breath

The chauffeur grinned

“For the perishing Opera, I don’t fink !”

“Say, what are you babbling about ?”

“What, ‘aven’t you ‘eard ? Cher ! There’s going to be a bloody revolution !”

"Well, what do you know?" exclaimed Gary

"So one of the chaps was telling me A real *bloody* revolution! Rivers of blood! Casino blown sky 'igh! What a lark, eh! Coo, I wouldn't miss that for much! A real bloody one I wish I knew what time it was Coo, I wouldn't 'arf like to push in a few of these dagos Cher! Real blood! What a *lark*, eh?"

"Say! How many of you boys know about this?"

"Oh—only me and Bert, and a chap with a French Rolls What you might call the *cognoscenti*."

The chauffeur nudged him, and lowered his voice

"I seen you snooping round a bit 'Ow about it, mate? Do we get the password?"

"D'you mean that?"

"All right, if you don't believe me Want to see me driving licence?"

Gary grinned suddenly "Swell! Care to come along at dawn?"

The chauffeur stepped back two paces smartly and saluted "Cars ordered for dawn, sir Right you are, sir."

Then the policeman spoke

"*Faut dormir un peu*."

Gary felt suddenly tired There was nothing more that he could do

"I guess you're right at that," he said

He dragged himself up the steps again (for the railway was no longer running), stopping at different levels to turn and look out over the darkness and the lights and the inky sea as he mounted up With utter weariness he acknowledged the unwilling salutes of the fierce moustachios and the quietly waiting women

"*Chin up, brother!*"

"*Chin up, sister!*"

Once he stopped to pat the head of a little girl who held up a doll to him as he passed

He reached the respectable, odoriferous little hotel at last, almost fell through the doorway, and flung himself,

with a white face, into one of the fragile chairs in the carpetless and airless *salle-à-manger*

For the night before an upheaval the scene was almost unbelievably prosaic, and in his condition of fatigue Gary yielded to it almost gratefully. Most of the diners had already left, to read or knit for half an hour over the tops of their spectacles before retiring to their beds. Their disordered napkins and half empty bottles of Graves testified to their departure. The heels of the little serving-girl clacked busily on the bare, highly polished boards. The air was heavy with the remnants of a generation of repasts and the foul reek of the French tobacco smoked, through a cigarette-holder, by the elderly gentleman in the corner with the grey beard, the pince-nez, the Legion of Honour, and the crossword.

In the middle a pale girl, whose skinny elbows projected sharply from the too-short sleeves of a home-made jumper, lingered, absorbed in the pages of a novel propped against a carafe of water. A tall slender lady, with hairpins, rose, and, at her rising, the gentleman in the corner scrambled politely to his feet. He bowed to her. She bowed to him. She bowed, less perceptibly, to Gary. Gary waved a feeble hand. She departed gracefully. Gary swung round in his chair and fell to, without enthusiasm, on some boiled, colourless fish, sicklied o'er with rubber mushrooms.

He did not go down into the town again, for he had shot his bolt. Instead, he sat in one of the two wicker chairs at the foot of the staircase, slumped down, untidy, dirty, and with his hair tumbling over his face, taking a fitful, uneasy interest in the pictures of a travel-advertisement for Japan. It was very quiet in the little hall. A very fat gentleman, with a book propped on one of the billows of his stomach, slept soundly. From somewhere round the corner came the tiny noise of knitting-needles. From time to time the old concierge, who was a kindly man, peered at Gary

short-sightedly with an expression of sympathetic apprehension After an hour of this Gary suddenly smashed the pages of the folder together in a way which made everybody jump, flung it on the wicker table, gave a hitch to his trousers, and went noisily up the stairs

The plump gentleman closed his mouth and opened one eye He had a deep bass voice

"*Type nerveux, ces Americains* "

"*Ah oui ! C'est affreux !*"

"*C'est atroce !*"

"*Enfin* "

"*Enfin* "

The grumbling of their voices followed Gary up the stairs, filling him with a wild and unreasoning irritation He lunged into his room and slammed the door His heavy footsteps, on the jerry-built, carpetless floor, shook the building He had a matchbox in his hand He waited there for a moment and then flung it with all his force at the enamelled jug beside the washstand, on the floor The box flung open and the matches spilled Then he passed a big, slender hand and wrist through that unruly lock, threw open the double windows which the maid had locked, and leaned once more with his elbows on the balcony

He tried to see his watch There were six hours—seven hours What time was this infernal dawn, anyway ? Say six hours and a half Sleep ? Impossible Six hours and a half Six hours and a half before those lamps of Nice, still strung half-way across the sky, yielded to the light, and a ship with Stephanie on board steamed round in a quiet semi-circle

"Yeah," said Gary disgustedly "I know Came the dawn "

He glared down resentfully at the Palace lights, at the floodlit front of the Casino

"I don't know what *you* make of this," said Gary,

"but if you want to know what *I* think I'll tell you I'm crazy!" And with that he slammed the window, gave the jerry a vicious kick, and flung himself on the iron bed

There was a gosh-darned awtul pattern on the wallpaper. There were a whole lot of violet bows. Bows, bows, bows. Whichever way you looked at the crack-pot things, they made lines for the eye to run along—diagonals, horizontals, diamonds, rhomboids. And wavy yellow lines. Miles of them! Waving in and out. And flashes of magenta. What the heck were those things? Were they baskets? The guy who designed a wallpaper like that. He imagined the guy who designed a wallpaper like that. One of these middle-aged, artistic Frenchmen. With a beard. Why, in the name of everything that was holy, should Frenchmen have so much hair? This guy had a beard. He was sitting very primly and precisely, with a drawing-board, and a light to one side of him just so, and a paint-brush in his hand, and he was drawing wavy yellow lines and magenta baskets. Gary went up to the guy with a piece of the paper in his hand and said "Hey, you! Did you design this?" The Frenchman said it was very artistic. He said that yellow wavy lines and mauve bows were considered pretty ravishing in the highest circles. "Yeah?" Gary said. "Well, I think they're absolutely lousy!" "*Mon cher monsieur*!" the Frenchman said.

He woke up with a start. What in thunder was the time? A quarter of one. He reached for a cigarette and lit it, inhaling deeply. Four hours? Five hours? He kicked himself from the bed and stood up, and went once more to open the window.

No dawn yet. But a lot of movement. The Nice lights twinkled. What the hell made those lights twinkle? Something to do with moisture. He couldn't see a blessed thing else in the sky. No sea, no sky, no horizon. Just lights. Down below the town lay

uneasily sleeping There were only the ground-floor lights now in the Palace windows, with an occasional square to mark a bedroom The town was dark All except the Casino The Casino was floodlit, and stood out from the soft darkness, stark, fairylike and improbable They probably kept the blamed things on all night

He wondered if those people were really asleep Those people who stood around in the doorways Not that he cared He yawned over the brooding city—or town—or state—or what the heck

He went back to the bed and lay on it again, with one arm behind his head, smoking his cigarette and blowing the smoke up to the ceiling Even the ceiling had those darned mauve bows It was enough to alter the whole history of Europe That reminded him of his rifle He felt underneath the bed and fetched it out Heavy thing And pretty useless, when you came to think of it One bullet, one hundred yards To think that guys went to war with things like that ! Any self-respecting gangster could have shown these European armies a thing or two about how to get results Gee ! Imagine going over the top with one of these in your hand ! And a long wriggly bayonet ! Could you really push a thing like that right through a guy ? He guessed you could, or they wouldn't fit the things

You did this, and you did that, and out came the magazine with six cartridges in it, and six long bullets Funny to think a little thing like that would kill a man But it would You put the magazine back like that, and click ! You wagged this knob, pulled it back, pushed it in again, pressed it down and—*wham* ! That let the daylight into *that* poor boob ! He'd half a mind to let a little daylight into some of those bows If he aimed at the third bow from the left of the seventh diagonal counting from the wall just above his head, the shot would very likely go clean through the bow,

clean through the ceiling, clean through the bed above,
and clean through the backside of that pale girl who
was reading the book at dinner. He crooked his finger
over the trigger and took careful aim. One eighth of
an inch, fellows! One eighth of an inch. Darn it,
he was getting morbid!

He put the thing down on the floor beside him and
started counting bows. Let's see, now. What was
it that guy had said? Oh yeah! Something about
being acceptable in the very highest circles. But that
was baskets, not bows. Yeah, that's right! *Baskets!*
Mon cher monsieur, these baskets. He fell
asleep.

It was four o'clock when he was suddenly wide
awake, with brain clear and pulses throbbing. He
made a quick, convulsive movement. Four o'clock!
He sprang to the window and looked out with sharp
eyes. Dark as pitch! And yet. And yet.
God! What time did they have their dawn around
these parts? Four o'clock. Maybe half an hour?
Maybe an hour?

He'd been right about that Casino. It was blazing
all right. Damned vulgar ostentation and the uses of
advertisement! Perhaps if he put his hand across it
and shielded it from his eyes. My God, there *was*
a light! A *distinct* light! Over there beyond Nice.

He swung back and turned off the room lights and
stared again.

Yeah! It was clear! Yeah, that's right! There was
no mistaking it. *The dawn!*

He began to tremble.

Gosh, this was terrific! Hold it, boys! This was one
of those moments! This was. Gosh! This was
the most exciting thing. This was.

Steady now! Steady!

He swallowed. Phew! Any signs of that ship yet?
Nary a sign! But the sky grew lighter. It was
obviously lighter. And *cold!* He had no idea how cold

it got in this part of the world in the early morning
Of course! That's what it was He was shivering!
If only he'd thought of a hot cup of coffee

What was that? Was that a ship? *Was that a*

He went and fetched the rifle No, he couldn't see
it now Must have imagined it

Were those other guys ready? His heart made six
gymnastic revolutions at the thought that those other
guys might not be ready Supposing they were asleep
in bed! André, and Rostand, and He eyed the
telephone

His eyes dropped and then travelled unthinkingly out
to sea again It—it *was* a ship! It WAS a ship! IT
WAS A SHIP!

He swallowed not less than fifteen times The gun
was in his hand He could make it out quite clearly
now, with its little red and green navigation lights,
steaming slowly in a ghostly sea It was dark behind the
lights of Nice, but in the east he could see clouds, and
fingers, and br—— A haze of coastline He whipped his
head round again There she was! Not more than a
mile away! A white yacht! As clear as clear! He
could see the wave, now, at her bows, and the gilt
about her pointed prows, and her wireless masts!
Gosh! Things were getting pretty near now! If only
it wasn't so cold! Were those other guys ready?
They must be! Here she comes! A lovely thing
Boy! *What a yacht!*

Travelling, too Difficult to see in this half light
She must be She must be Hey! Was she up to
the green harbour light? She was! She was! She
was within inches! Christ—it was *now!*

He gripped the rifle tightly *Now for it! Now for it!*
Now for——

Boom—Boom—Boom—Boom—Boom—Boom!

Gary let out a sudden, wild, ear-splitting yell

"*Hooray!*" yelled Gary "*Hooray!*" he yelled

With distended nostrils he raced to the door and

clattered down the stairs, yelling as he ran. He burst out into the street

"*Hey!*" yelled Gary, beside himself "*Hooray! Hey! Hooray! Up the Revolution! Hooray!*"

He tore down the steps of the shelving street, noticing nothing, brandishing his rifle above his head, yelling and screaming himself hoarse. He came out into the Casino Square "*Hooray!*" he yelled "*Hooray! Whoops! Yahoo! Zowie! Yahoo! Ahoy! Up the Revolution! Down with all the dirty cads! Yow! Yippee! Hoor—*"

It seemed very quiet in the Casino Square

"*Yor!*" shouted Gary "*Up the Revolution! Up the cads! Yoohoo!*" He fired off six shots into the air. There was a sudden swirl of pigeons.

Where were the others? He looked about him. Only the pigeons fluttered in the air.

"*Hey!*" shouted Gary doubtfully, turning in his tracks.

The negro porter came out through the swing-doors of the Hôtel de France in his shirt-sleeves, blinking.

"Is this here the revolution, suh?" he enquired.

Gary flung the rifle on to the ground.

"Say, what is this?" he demanded.

"I don't know, suh, I'm sho', 'nless you do."

Three policemen came marching, with their tassels swinging, up the hill, past the entrance to the hotel. The front one was his friend.

Gary's eye lit up.

"*Come on, boys!*" shouted Gary "*Come on! Storm the Casino! Up the Revolution! Up the Reds!*"

"I place you," said the foremost policeman, evidently reciting a lesson, "under arrest."

"*You what?*"

"I place you," repeated the policeman, "under arrest. Beards," he added, waving a hand at the outraged pigeons.

"But—but—you can't arrest *me!* What about the revolution?"

The policeman spoke with elaborate distinctness

"Vous venez avec nous You—come—please"

Gary breathed rapidly through his nostrils

"No, you don't!" he said "You dirty double-crossers! You yellow rats! *Umph!*" He lunged out at the nearest policeman

But those policemen were astonishingly quick His flying arm was caught in a grip of iron In another moment a foot was between his two legs A second later, and another arm was twined about his left, pulling it behind him, pulling it up behind his back, lifting it

He fought like a madman, stamping, kicking, jerking, twisting, struggling

In the grey distance two chauffeurs came running, one fifty yards ahead of the other

"*Oi!*" shouted the first one, waving his arms "*Oi! Wait for me! Oi!* Where's the revolution?"

Gary was pinioned He was helpless

"I'll murder you for this!" he said "You can't do this to me! I'm an American citizen!"

The chauffeur turned on his heel and accosted Bert

"Too late again, Bert," he said "They've 'ad it!"

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

AT FIRST THEY "FROG-MARCHED" HIM THROUGH THE silent streets, but afterwards, when they found him too exhausted and dejected to do anything but go quietly, they marched one on either side of him and one behind

"Give me a cigarette, somebody "

His friend the policeman produced a yellow packet from the pocket of his tunic and held a match for him, obsequiously waiting, while the phosphorus spluttered and flared until the wood was burning brightly

"*Ca va ?*"

"Uh-huh "

"*Bon ! En avant !*"

The little procession made its way, with the jingle of spurs and the clank of swords, past the sleeping hotels, by the walls and the iron gates and the fleshy plants of villas, round two sides of a little church tucked under the tall, yawning arch of the railway viaduct, and so through some of those meaner streets he had canvassed from door to door the day before. Now the doors were tight shut. Rows and rows of tightly shut doors, whose panels seemed symbolic and unfriendly in the early morning light.

At last they came to a neat little fortress, built, like everything else, in clean white stucco, but castellated round the roof, and with crossed arrow-slits to peep from, through the bougainvillaea, instead of windows. A blue flag flew from one of the corner turrets, and on it, in plain white letters, was the one word "Police"

"Do we go in here ?" Gary asked

"*S'il vous plait, monsieur. Passez, monsieur*"

"Well, you needn't be so darned polite about it. This old-world courtesy gives me the creeps "

"*Passez, monsieur. Passez*"

"O K ," said Gary "It's a pleasure "

They walked up three steps with military precision

"Now where ?"

"*Pardon, monsieur* "

The nearest policeman bent civilly to open a door on the right, and held it for him

"Do I go in ?"

"*S'il vous plait, monsieur* "

Gary found himself in a pleasant office with a fire burning in the grate It was inhabited by a magnificent individual with rows of medals on his chest, and a pith helmet on his head, who rose gallantly to his feet as Gary entered, removed the helmet with a flourish and bowed

"I very much regret," said this individual

"That's all right," said Gary weakly

"Monsieur has not slept ?"

"Not much," Gary admitted

The magnificent individual clucked with his tongue

"To lead a revolution, there is very much excitement

Very much fatigue *Une chaise !*"

The three policemen competed as to who should be first to fetch a chair

"You're telling me," Gary agreed, sinking into it

"*Très bien* " The magnificent individual pulled up the tails of his frock-coat, waggled his posterior, and lowered it gently, and with infinite caution, on to his own chair Then he pulled a sheet of paper towards him Then he made a thoughtful selection of pens

"*Votre nom, monsieur* ?"

"Williams "

"Villumts *Prenom* ?"

"Which ?"

"*Arstide* ?" suggested the individual "*Auguste* ?"

"Oh yeah, I get you Gary "

"You spell ?"

"G—A—R—Y "

"J ?"

"No, G "

"You will write, please "

He turned the paper round and held out a pen

"Sure," said Gary, getting up and taking the pen, sticking his tongue out of one corner of his mouth, and writing his name in a fair hand

"*Ah, bon ! J—A—R—Y Comme le cinema !*"

"You win, pal," said Gary feebly

"*Votre adresse ?*"

"Hôtel Flora-Metropole "

The pen of the magnificent individual scratched

"*Hôtel Flora-Metropole* "

He drew a line underneath it, surveyed his handiwork, blotted it, blew his nose, took a pinch of snuff, sneezed, wiped his moustache with a very clean white handkerchief, replaced it in the cuff of his uniform, rose and held out his hand

"*Merci, monsieur* I very much regret "

"That goes for me too," said Gary "Thanks, all the same "

"It is nothing, monsieur I hope your incarceration will be pleasant "

"Incarceration !"

The *Chef de Police* rapped out sudden orders, in a rasping tone The three policemen sprang to attention and turned to the right

"Hey !" said Gary "Wait a minute ! I demand to see the American Consul ! You can't incarcerate *me* !"

"*Marchez !*" bawled the magnificent individual

The three policemen marched, and, since Gary was in the middle of them, he marched too, albeit crabwise

"O K ," muttered Gary grimly "O K ! You wait, that's all ! I'm one of these revengeful guys You wait till our Ambassador hears about this ! Oh, all right, all right ! Only stop pushing me, will you ?"

They led him out of the door opposite to the one by which they had entered from the street, down a long whitewashed passage to the right, down another long

passage, up a flight of stairs, down another long resonant and intensely chilly passage till they halted at a door at the end

The first policeman produced a large key from his trouser pocket, but found it did not fit the lock. There was some discussion about this in excited undertones, while Gary leaned wearily against the wall. Finally, another policeman was despatched to report the matter. While he was away the first policeman, unwilling to admit defeat, examined the key closely, inserted it again, rattled it furiously, examined it anew, and made the experiment of inserting it upside down. It worked.

"Ah ! Voilà ! Entrez, monsieur"

Gary heaved himself upright from the wall, yawned cavernously, felt his unshaven chin, saluted with his fingers, and went in. The door banged behind him. The key turned in the lock.

He was in a plain, unfurnished room. He looked round at the whitewashed walls, and the plain unvarnished floor, without interest. There was a door in one of the walls, and, as a matter of routine, he tried it. It was locked.

"Qui est là ?" a voice cried in alarm.

Gary's scalp moved.

"Who is there ?" repeated the voice, in English.

"Stephanie !" he shouted. *"Stephanie ! It's me ! Gary !"*

The lock in the door turned and the door opened.

She was in a fur coat, with a handkerchief tied round her hair.

"Stephanie !" he exclaimed again, crouching. *"Are you all right ?"*

The obvious thing was to take her in his arms, but he was diffident.

"There was a key in it," she explained. *"So I turned it."*

"Pretty wise, at that," he agreed. *"You never*

know who you may be liable to run into in these foreign prisons "

She would not look at him Instead, she looked over her shoulder

"Still one of those flippant guys ?"

"That's me !" he said, and then in a more gentle voice "Steph, you look about all in——"

"Oh, *mon Gary* !" she whispered, and fell against him, like a tired child, with one hand on each of his shoulders and her cheek against his sweater

He picked her up There was a wooden bench running along the wall He carried her to it and set her down, sat beside her, pillowed her head against his chest and closed his eyes

"I told you there was nothing in this revolution racket," he said "Let's go to sleep and forget all about it "

Her hand found the lapel of his coat and held it

He fell to kissing the top of her head

Gary awoke to find M Reynaud standing before them.

M Reynaud was nodding his head and wagging his beard reflectively and saying to himself over and over again "*C'est charmant, n'est-ce-pas ? Oh, c'est charmant ! Voyez-vous ! C'est charmant, n'est-ce-pas ?*"

"Get out !" said Gary "Sorry, Steph Go on, get out !"

M Reynaud had the appearance of kindness personified His eyes twinkled He bowed to Stephanie and murmured "*Altesse* "

"D'you hear what I say ? *Get the hell out of here !* What's the time ?"

"It is just after nine o'clock," said M Reynaud "You have had breakfast ?"

"No, thanks," said Gary "Now beat it, will you ?"

"Gary, you must not be so rude That is M Reynaud."

"Am I likely to forget it?"

M Reynaud seemed surprised at the ferocity of his tone. He licked those very clean lips, so hairless in so much hair, and decided to speak in rather a formal tone.

"I am sorry," he said, "that the revolution has proved such a fiasco. It is not my fault, I assure you, Monsieur Williams. I have done nothing to stop it. In fact, I did not even know. The spirit in Monte Cristo, I am afraid, is very bad. Very bad. There is no loyalty. There is no idealism. For me, perhaps, this is fortunate, but for you, believe me, I quite understand. I am very sorry. And for you, *Altesse*. You are made to look a little ludicrous, monsieur, but what of that? It will pass. You must not bear any grudge to me. Is it my fault if you are the only man who makes the revolt?"

"Maybe not," Gary agreed. "Though I wouldn't put it above a dirty murderer!"

Monsieur Reynaud was clearly astounded.

"A murderer?" he repeated.

"Certainly! D'you think I make revolutions for fun? D'you think I fire guns off every day of my life? It's only because this town is run by a bunch of killers that I—— Say! Have you got the neck to deny that?"

"You will tell me, please. Whom did I murder?"

"Now, listen," said Gary, holding up three fingers. "Three times you tried to make away with Stephanie here."

"I tried to make away with the Princess?"

"Gary, you are being one of these absurd guys!"

"I know what I'm talking about! Did you or did you not hire a car to run down Stephanie in the Rue de la Boétie?"

"Never!"

"You didn't?"

"But, my dear monsieur, every car will run down

everybody in the Rue de la Boétie, free, gratis and for sheer *joie de vivre* ! To hire the traffic in Paris to run down the pedestrian, it is not necessary "

Gary narrowed his eyes

"Is that so ? Well, what about the elevator cord ? What about the little guy who fixed the awning ? What about that precious senator who darned nearly slaughtered Prince Paul ?"

"The elevator cord ? A little guy ? A senator ? You astonish me, monsieur !"

"That elevator cord was hanging by about three strands !"

M Reynaud shrugged his shoulders

"Naturally !" he exclaimed "Every elevator cord in Paris hangs by about three strands "

"Oh yeah ?"

"It is one of our national characteristics," said M Reynaud "As for the little guy with the awning——"

"I suppose he ran about half the night on the sidewalk just measuring up ?"

"Very likely," agreed M Reynaud "It is perfectly probable "

Gary looked at M Reynaud sideways

"Am I supposed to believe all that ?"

"Really, my dear *monsieur* !" remarked M Reynaud almost angrily "It is a matter of very little moment to me what you believe, I can assure you In France, fortunately, a man may still believe what he chooses But in Monte Cristo, at any rate, I am only the man who can do what he chooses I very much regret, monsieur," he continued simply, "that I had previously omitted to inform you that I am the President of the Republic Ridiculous, is it not ?"

Gary pinched himself

"Say, is this real ?"

M Reynaud smiled "Sometimes I am tempted to ask myself this same question," he said "Nevertheless,

I am given to understand that it is so It was decided upon when we arranged *our* little revolution ”

Gary turned to Stephanie “Is that right ?”

Stephanie faced M. Reynaud imperiously

“If there is no Republic of Monte Cristo,” she said, “how can there be a President of the Republic ?”

M. Reynaud gravely accepted the rebuff

“It is a pure technicality, *Altesse* Nevertheless, if I might be allowed to issue my orders for a moment ”

He bowed interrogatively to each

“Oh, sure,” said Gary generously “Go right ahead ”

M. Reynaud waited for Stephanie to speak

“We are prepared to listen,” she informed him graciously

“Thank you,” said M. Reynaud “I am very much afraid that I must adhere to my original plans We wish no more revolutions ” He clicked his finger and two policemen entered the room “I understand, Monsieur Williams, that you still wish to marry this lady ?”

“I certainly do !” shouted Gary “And let me tell you——”

M. Reynaud held up his hand He bowed to the Princess

“And you, *Altesse* ?”

“Naturally,” said Stephanie

“Then,” said M. Reynaud solemnly, “I pronounce you man and wife ” Only his eyes twinkled “It is quite painless, is it not ?”

Gary and Stephanie looked at each other, and then at M. Reynaud

“It is quite all right,” M. Reynaud assured them “It works ”

“*Married* ?” whispered Gary, feeling a little faint

“Does it feel uncomfortable ?”

Gary eased his collar “Well, I hardly know yet
I Gosh ! *Married* !”

Suddenly Stephanie flung her arms round M Reynaud's neck and began kissing him

"Hey there !" shouted Gary "Hey ! Not so fast ! Say, wait a minute ! Do I get the reward ?"

"Ah, no, monsieur !"

"I don't get it ?"

"I am so sorry, monsieur "

"What about my five thousand a year for life ?"

"It does not materialize, monsieur The offer was withdrawn "

"Don't I even get the bathing beaches ?"

"No, monsieur "

"It's a swindle ! Say ! *Will you please stop making love to my wife ?*" He tapped Stephanie on the shoulder "D'you mind if I cut in ?"

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THERE WAS A GENTLENESS ABOUT THE SUNSHINE NOW, and a softness about the white fronts of the great hotels of the Promenade des Anglais which receded in a magnificent semi-circle into more and more opulent haze. The sky was a paler blue, and the unrippled surface of the Mediterranean stretched, entirely placid and inviting, to where a streak of silver marked the extremities of sea and sky.

The yellow railings of the bath the most worldly of all the Mediterranean littoral were warm to the touch, but no queue formed. Only Madame Harry herself, her lined old face bronzed like a negress's, a cigarette in her mouth, and the warm wind playing with her untidy grey hair and the folds of her tremendous figure, leaned against one of the uprights of the gate.

Through the interstices of the railings a few of the hardier spirits among all that was most bourgeoisie and most respectable of the population of Nice could be seen disporting themselves on the pebbles of the beach. There was a very thin boy with close-cropped hair, and a brown body bared by the rolling down of the upper portion of his vestment-of-the-bath, throwing a brightly coloured ball into the air. There was the unwieldy and almost unrecognizable bulk of a fat, foreshortened lady lying on her back and reading *The Sex Life of the Dictators*. In the middle distance a determined young woman, with a mountain of pink flesh swelling between her trunks and her brassière, supported her bulk on shoulders and elbows and bicycled in the air with her legs. A few paces from her a lady and a gentleman, in formal black, sat side by side giving their bare feet to the sun. A very small boy with a

very large bicycle came wobbling down the promenade, to stop with one foot on the railings and to whistle at the prospect. Madame Harry took no notice.

Presently a very tall young man and a smallish girl arrived, walking with their arms about each other's waists. The girl wore a fur coat, open, and a handkerchief knotted round her head, and the young man had wild hair rustling in the breeze, a much-creased suit, a tie which flapped, an ecstatic expression, and a vividly unshaven chin.

They advanced upon Madame Harry's, looking into each other's eyes with that slow, swinging motion of the very-much-in-love. When they reached the corner of the railings they looked over them with a friendly, reminiscent smile, and then they kissed. Madame Harry took no notice.

They wandered up in step to the wicket gate. The young man held out a ten-franc note.

"*Cabine familiale*," he said. "*Double*."

Madame Harry looked them sharply up and down, with evident suspicion.

"*Vous êtes mariés ?*" she snapped.

The young man laughed confidently.

"Are we married?" he exclaimed.

The girl laughed too confidently.

"*Vous êtes sûr que vous êtes mariés ?*"

"Sure! Sure!" said Gary.

The boy with the bicycle came closer.

Madame Harry peered steadfastly into their faces. Her lips were drawn into a grim line. The young man who was throwing the ball threw it by mistake in their direction, and, scrambling to retrieve it, discovered a sudden interest in the scene, and stayed to watch. Suddenly Madame Harry made a grab for Stephanie's left hand, examined it, gave a savage growl of triumph, and held it up for all the world to see.

"*Mariés !*" exclaimed Madame Harry with bitter scorn. "*Où est l'anneau alors ?* *Augh ! Il n'y a pas*

d'anneau ! Je sais très bien que vous n'est pas mariés du tout de tout ! Blagueurs ! Toujours la mendace, eh ? Oh, ho, ho ! Allez Allez-vous-en ! Oh, ho, ho !
 And much more in the same strain Her fingers flew
 Her eyes flashed contempt Her deep bass voice
 brayed over the Promenade des Anglais

The lady and the gentleman in correct black came dancing over the pebbles with their bare feet A porter from one of the hotels came running, hurrying into his coat

"Now listen, sister ! Will you let me get *one* word in ?"

Madame Harry was prepared to allow nothing of the sort

A touring car, with a party of fishermen holding long rods, drew gently to a stop

"Qu'est-ce-qu'il arrive là ?"

"Ne sont pas mariés On demande une cabine double !"

"Oh, ho, ho !"

The word went round

"Pas mariés Ils demandent une cabine double"

A black-clad priest paused in his devotions to look over his book A long crocodile of small boys in berets, Eton collars and socks, paused, in charge of a nun The determined girl stopped her bicycling and wobbled over, looking hot and flushed

"I tell you," Gary kept saying, "*we are married !* Say, Stephanie, *you* tell her ! I can't make the old dame understand Stop bawling me out, will you ? And listen to me Can't you understand, woman ? We were married this morning ! Say, don't we *look* like elderly married guys ? Now come clean, will you, before this starts a riot !"

Two Englishmen stopped and removed their pipes

"What's up, old boy ?"

"Damned if I know, old boy"

"Can *you* see anything ?"

"Not a thing "

"Seems to be some kind of an argument "

A bi-lingual gentleman with the Legion of Honour explained the situation "They are not married They wish—vish—to share a *cabine* "

"I say ! Not really ?"

"I say, old boy, did you hear what he said ?"

"I say !"

"*Non non non non non* !" said the voice of Madame Harry

"I tell you," Gary shouted back, "I'm one of these knightly guys ! I tell you we *are* married !"

"*Non !*" said Madame Harry

"Listen !" said Gary "*Je—demande—oon—cabine —famihale* !"

Madame Harry did not answer Instead she slammed the wicket gate, locked it with a tremendous and triumphant gesture of finality, gave a last nod of insulting dismissal, and, with arms akimbo, marched firmly down the beach

Gary sat down suddenly on an upturned barrel

"Well !" he demanded of the universe "What do you know ?"

THE END

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have pleasure in giving the following brief notices of many important new books and novels by some of the greatest living writers.

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General Fiction

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TO-MORROW COM

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N W NOV L

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TH GODS FORG T

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IT was not until the stern parental displeasure that followed her cret arriage had descended upon her that Beverley Firth was able to see her husband, Tod, for the selfish young weakling that he was

er love for him now d d, she left him After a time, however, as to save her husband fro penury, she rejoined hi d they led a - detached life in a s all, ch p flat, still hating each other

By degrees Tod beca e less spoilt, he learned to se life differently, he even began to work hard at a job he hated

In spite of past disillusion ts, Beverley found her old love tu g, d finally they started arried life again on a happier basis 7s 6d

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